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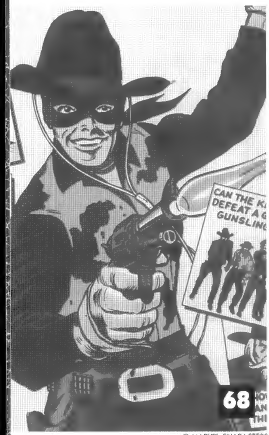

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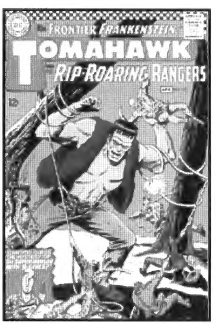
Oddball Comics © 2003 by Scott Shaw! (SWB 1:1)

What's a giant Frankenstein monster doing in the Revolutionary War? DC's *Tomahawk* may have been set during then, but that didn't stop the series' editorial team from injecting dinosaurs, giant apes and other fantastic creatures into the historical goings-on to stimulate sales, an edict usually dictated by DC's business manager Irwin Donenfeld. But this issue was particularly Oddball, even surpassing *Tomahawk*'s usual outlandish fare by tapping into a national fascination with classic movie monsters, as exemplified by the "Shock Theatre" syndicated package of Universal monster movies, the TV series *The Munsters* and *The Addams Family* and Aurora's line of plastic model kits.

This issue's two-part, 16-page cover story, "The Frontier Frankenstein!" was written by France Herron and drawn by Bob Brown. Tomahawk and his Rangers arrive to rescue the occupants of Simpkin's Kettle Works, and find themselves under attack from a huge, red-eyed, green-skinned, square-headed monster wearing torn purple pants! No, it's not The Incredible Hulk (wrong publisher, kiddo)—it's a gigantic lookalike of Frankenstein's monster (as portrayed by Boris Karloff) from Universal's 1939 classic film, *The Son of Frankenstein*—complete with a shaggy fur vest!



See this Oddball cover in full Oddball color in our color pages!

Also included in this issue of *Tomahawk* are the stories and features: "The Super-Ranger With 9 Lives!" drawn by Fred Ray, "Do YOU Make Life Hard For Yourself?" a public service page written by Jack Schiff and drawn by Bernard Baily, a "Chief Hot Foot" gag-page by cartoonist Henry Boltinoff, a half-page "Cap's Hobby Center" gag-strip by Boltinoff, and a half-page ad for AMT model kits, drawn by the great Chic Stone.

TOMAHAWK
Issue Number: 103
Date: March-April 1966
Publisher: National Periodical Publications, Inc. (DC Comics)
Cover Artist: Bob Brown

ODDBALL Factoid: Cartoonist Fred Ray was also an acknowledged expert on the actual Revolutionary War! (You know, the boring one without any monsters, dinosaurs, giant gorillas, aliens, supervillains, supernatural spirits or "fabulous" frontier chimps!)

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

For many of us, it all started with ...cowboys.

Listening to The Lone Ranger on the radio, going to the Saturday movies to see Hoppy, Gene and Roy—and then spending the rest of the week playing "cowboy." We'd strap on our six-shooters and "ride" all around the neighborhood, picking off bad guys.

For a kid like me, born in 1937, these radio and movie cowboys were my heroes before I learned about Batman, Superman and Captain Marvel. And they had the added advantage of being real. We knew, even then, that Superman was a fictitious character, but Roy Rogers was real.

Here's something to think about:

Each western movie that we saw, or western comic book that we read, reinforced the moralistic "good guys" and "bad guys" lesson, and if you were a little boy or girl growing up in the 1930s and 1940s, you absorbed these moral lessons on a daily basis. These simplistic horse operas taught us what to do if we want to be good guys. I count myself as lucky to be in that generation. But what about kids of today and the recent past? Who are their media heroes, and what values do they espouse? It seems to this old fart that "heroes" like Snoop Dogg or Ice T, Brittney Spears or Ozzie—who influence their millions of fans to want to be like them—just make me want to go back to the days of real heroes like Roy Rogers and Gene Autry.

Russ Cochran, circa 1944, out behind our house in West Plains, Missouri. The cowboy shirt in this picture was my favorite and I wanted to wear it every day, so my Mom had to wash it after I went to bed so I could have it the next day.

The cowboy heroes really took hold in comic books after the end of World War II, when the super-hero comic books had peaked and were starting to decline in popularity. My favorites were the Dell comics with those wonderfully sharp full color photo covers. You could study them, absorbing the details of Roy's fancy Nudie shirts and his seemingly endless supply of fancy cowboy boots. You could see every detail on his pistol and gun belt. The stories inside these comics were usually pedestrian, but those covers were terrific.

Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear, the good guys and the bad guys.

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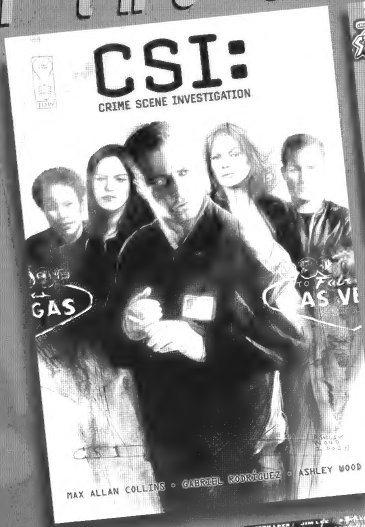

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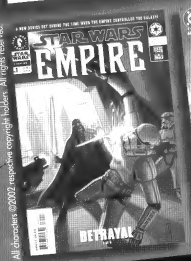

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How DC's Western Anthologies Became Anachronisms

Colorful Cowboys and Inspiring Indians Rode High in the Fifties

by Michelle Nolan

Two of the most colorful comic books DC was publishing at the dawn of the Silver Age were doomed by the gradual decline of the western in American popular culture.

From the standpoint of quality, *All Star Western* and *Western Comics* continued to improve right up until their demise in 1961, so they should not be overlooked by collectors. By that time, however, six guns were quickly giving way to super-heroes and space ships.

The popularity of western stories reached their peak in the three-decade period of the 1930s through the 1950s. If you could somehow count all western-themed movies, pulp magazines, paperback and hardbound books, comic books, radio shows and television broadcasts produced in that 30-year period, their number easily would exceed 50,000.

In fact, most collectors of western fiction quickly become narrowly focused on favorite characters or authors, so vast is the genre. Even if money were not a consideration, it probably would not be possible in anyone's lifetime to amass more than a half-complete collection of all the western fiction ever produced in one form or another—and that doesn't even include the untold thousands of fact-based books and magazines covering Western Americana.

But even as long ago as the 1960s and '70s, interest in the western in all forms of popular culture began to decline steadily, although there were (and even still are) always a few high spots with enthusiastic fans—Clint Eastwood and John Wayne in the movies, *Bonanza* on television, Louis L'Amour in the book world.

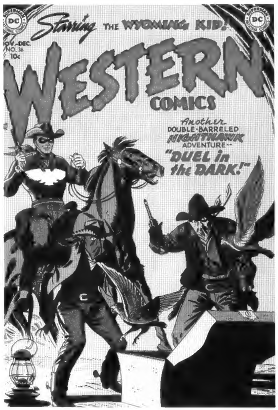
I'm told by used-book dealers that the vast majority of people who still read westerns are men in their fifties and older. In fact, many of the dealers will take dog-eared western paperbacks because they often can't get them any other way, in contrast to the high condition standards they hold for accepting any other kind of used books.

Marvel Comics produced some wonderful tongue-in-cheek westerns during the 1960s and '70s, but, for the most part, you have to go back to the 1950s to find good western comic books. So return with us now to those thrilling DC days of yesteryear, when the company produced the best of the western anthologies.

The majority of the most popular western comics of the 1940s and '50s were devoted largely to single characters, especially those with roots in movies and television—particularly from Dell Comics, the king of the western from the standpoint of sheer volume, if not always quality. For consistent quality in both stories and art, my vote would go to the titles from Magazine Enterprises (which folded in 1958) and DC, then known as National Comics.

DC, however, did not do as well with individual stars as it did with anthologies loaded with original characters found only in comic books, although DC did successfully license movie characters such as Hopalong Cassidy, Dale Evans and Jimmy Wakely. I'm not counting *Tomahawk* as a western—that comes under the category of "colonial pre-western" in my book.

In fact, DC's first such title—*Western Comics*—was the only western anthology to be continuously published in the 1948-61 period, bridging the period from the end of the



Western Comics #36 (Nov/Dec 1952), cover by Ruben Moreira and the only cover appearance by Nighthawk.

Golden Age to the full flowering of the Silver Age.

In fact, when DC shot down *Western Comics* and *All Star Western* in 1961, the only other western anthologies still going were Marvel's *Gunsmoke Western* and Charlton's *Six-Gun Heroes* and *Outlaws of the West*.

DC's second attempt at a western anthology, *All-American Western*, lasted 24 issues from 1948-52 before it was converted to one of the company's first three war titles. Thankfully, the company immediately transferred the title's best character, Johnny Thunder, to *All Star Western*.

DC's western anthologies were especially noteworthy for improbable but highly entertaining, plot-driven tales filled with gimmicks and concepts seldom seen in most such comics. In all, DC used only 16 characters to fill the 171 issues making up the three anthologies. The company also published an eight-issue run of *Frontier Fighters* in 1955-56, but even though that title contained three characters, it was primarily designed as a vehicle to promote the Davy Crockett craze of the period, and lasted only as long as the Crockett fad.

Western Comics #1 (Jan/Feb 1948) replaced *More Fun Comics*—which ran its last 20 issues as a humor title—on DC's publishing schedule. The first four features were the highly successful Wyoming Kid, the generically named Cowboy Marshall, the amusing backup Rodeo Rick and Vigilante, which already had been appearing every month for seven years in *Action Comics*. Cowboy Marshall was the cover feature of #1, but Wyoming Kid took over with #2 and held that position through #42.

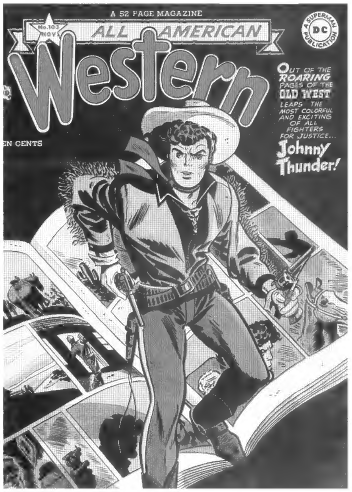
Vigilante, a western character set in modern times, ran from *Action* #42 (Nov 1941) through #198 (Nov 1954) without missing an issue, but Vigilante ran only in the first four issues of *Western Comics*. I've always wondered whether the adventures of Greg Sanders, "The Prairie Troubadour," and his young partner Stuff might have been discontinued in 1954 because of the impending arrival of the Comics Code Authority and the trouble DC seemed likely to have with the name of the character.

Vigilante was replaced by a more interesting costumed character, Nighthawk with his horse Nightwing, often drawn in beautiful fashion by Ruben Moreira. After debuting in #5 but missing #6, Nighthawk ran in every issue from #7-76, lasting through the end of the '50s. His only cover appearance came on #36—one of the most difficult DC comics of the period to locate. I've always considered Nighthawk, who specialized in fighting crime during darkness, to be the final Golden Age costumed hero to be introduced by DC—or perhaps he should be considered the first hero to bridge the Golden and Silver Ages. Nighthawk's alter ego was handyman Hannibal Hawkes, who drove a fix-it wagon by day. Many of the stories involved Nighthawk's secret identity.

The Cowboy Marshall, Jimmy Sawyer and his horse Bronc, appeared in all but one of the first 42 issues of *Western Comics*. Rodeo Rick and his horse Comet missed only six of the first 60 issues. These stories of a crime-fighting cowboy and rodeo star were competent but strictly backup material.

Western Comics became a far better book when Pow-Wow Smith, the Indian Lawman, moved to *Western* with #43 (Jan/Feb 1954) after an entertaining 52-issue run in *Detective* #151 (Sep 1949) through #202 (Dec 1953). Pow-Wow Smith, one of the best Indian strips in all of comics history, may not have had a politically correct name, but the character was anything but a stereotype. Pow-Wow Smith, whose Sioux name of Ohiyesa meant "The Winner," followed a white friend to college, became a star student and athlete, and was noted for quick thinking in tight spots. Often rendered in fast-moving fashion by Carmine Infantino, he became one of DC's best supporting characters and deserves an article of his own.

The Wyoming Kid (Johnny Jones with his horse Racer) appeared in every issue of *Western* but #80. He was so pop-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Johnny Thunder!
DC

The first issue of **All-American Western** (#103, formerly **All-American Comics**, Nov 1948), Alex Toth cover of Johnny Thunder, who began in **AA Comics** #100.

ular he also ran in *World's Finest Comics* #42-64, giving him 107 stories in all—the most among DC's Old West characters. He was a solid character, but nothing more, and was rightfully relegated to backup status when Pow-Wow Smith moved over from *Detective*.

For the final nine issues of *Western* (#77-85), Matt Savage Trail Boss replaced Nighthawk. Matt Savage's stories, probably inspired by television shows such as *Rawhide* and *Wagon Train*, captured the cover from Pow-Wow Smith. *Western* #43-85 are all outstanding examples of storytelling. The first 42 issues are much more generic, but *Western Comics* apparently was so successful that it went monthly from #18 (Dec 1950) through #30 (Dec 1951) before returning to its bi-monthly format.

All-American Western, which ran from #103 (Nov 1948) through #126 (Jun/Jul 1952), featured Alex Toth's rousing renditions of Johnny Thunder, whose debut in *All-American Comics* #100 knocked Green Lantern off the cover for the final three issues. Toth also did most of the covers, several of them among the best in western comics history.

IN THIS ISSUE! The TRIGGER TWINS
10c
NO. 63
ALL STAR WESTERN
Strong Bow DUELS THE MASTER OF INDIAN MAGIC IN "BOOM of the LAKE DEMON!"

All Star Western #62 (Feb/Mar 1952), a classic cover.

Johnny Thunder's secret identity was that of seemingly meek schoolteacher John Tane, the son of the sheriff of Mesa City of the same name. Just like Clark Kent, John Tane wore glasses and pretended to be far less than he was, but DC also threw in a quirk by having him use "black dust" to disguise his hair. These were the best of all DC western stories, certainly my favorites. Thankfully, when *All-American Western* became *All-American Men of War*, DC transferred Johnny Thunder to *All Star Western* with #67 (Oct/Nov 1952). He wound up with a grand total of 80 appearances—every single one of them collectible.

All-American Western also featured an intriguing feminist Annie Oakley type in Overland Coach, starring Tony Barrette. Tony, whose full name was Antoinette, was DC's only female western strip and a significant loss after only 24 appearances. I would rank her strip as one of DC's Top Ten "minor" efforts. The other strips in *All-American Western*, Foley of the Fighting Fifth and Minstrel Maverick starring Harmony Hayes, weren't bad either. Foley, a good cavalry strip, appeared in 73 stories in all after his transfer to *All Star Western* with #66.

In comics lore, *All Star Western* has received more than its share of nostalgic knocks for being the title that pushed the Justice Society out of *All Star Comics* after #57. In reality, though, *All Star Western* eventually became the best of all western anthologies.

The strips in *All Star Western* #58 (Apr/May 1951) were the debuts of the Trigger Twins, Strong Bow, Don Caballero and the Roving Ranger. Don Caballero, set

[continued on page 10]

DC WESTERN ANTHOLOGIES

WESTERN COMICS
#1 (Jan/Feb 1948) through #85 (Jan/Feb 1961).
Wyoming Kid #1-79, 81-85. Cover feature #2-35, 37-42.
Vigilante #1-4.
Cowboy Marshall #1-30, 32-42. Cover feature #1.
Rodeo Rick #1-27, 31, 33-37, 39-67, 69.
Nighthawk #5, 7-76. Cover feature #36.
Pow-Wow Smith #43-85. Cover feature #43-76.
Matt Savage, Trail Boss #77-85. Cover feature #77-85.
Notes: 52 pages #1-27; 44 pages #28; 36 pages #29-85.

ALL-AMERICAN WESTERN
#103 (Nov 1948) through #126 (Jun/Jul 1952).
Johnny Thunder #103-126. Cover feature #103-126.
Overland Coach with Tony Barrett #103-126.
Minstrel Maverick #103-122, 124-126.
Foley of the Fighting 5th #103-126.
Notes: 52 pages #103-121; 44 pages #122; 36 pages #123-126.

ALL STAR WESTERN
#58 (Apr/May 1951) through #119 (Jun/Jul 1961).
Trigger Twins #58-116. Cover feature #58, 60, 64-86, 89, 91-101.
Strong Bow #58-99. Cover feature #59, 61-63.
Roving Ranger #58-61, 64-66.
Don Caballero #58-65.
Foley of the Fighting 5th #66-107, 109-115.
Johnny Thunder #67-119; with Madame .44 #117-119. Cover feature #87-88, 90, 102-119. Johnny Thunder cover logo #108-119.
Super Chief #117-119.
Notes: 52 pages #58-60; 44 pages #61; 36 pages #62-119.

Other appearances of anthology characters
Pow-Wow Smith—**DETECTIVE** #151 (Sep 1949)-#202 (Dec 1953).
Vigilante—**ACTION** #42 (Nov 1941)-#198 (Nov 1954).
Wyoming Kid—**WORLD'S FINEST** #42 (Sep/Oct 1949)-#64 (May/Jun 1953).

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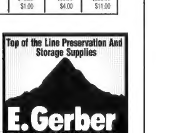

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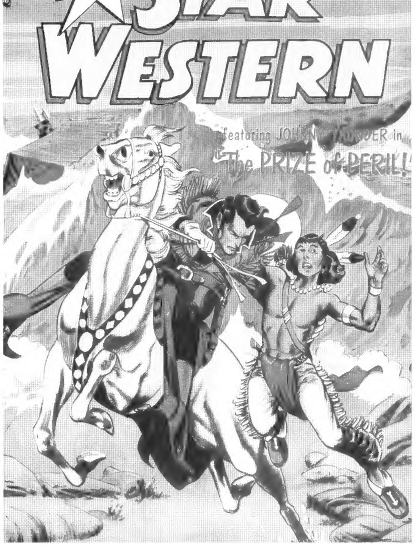
[continued from page 8]

in the "long-ago California town of Hawk Hill," was a nicely rendered Zorro knockoff sans mask and secret identity, but this swordsman lasted only through #65. Likewise, the Roving Ranger was a Lone Ranger knockoff sans mask and faithful Indian companion, and appeared only in #58-62 and #64-66.

The Trigger Twins, on the other hand, was a creative strip featuring a classic—if endless—series of improbable events involving Walt and Wayne Trigger. Walt was the bumbling, luckless, mistake-prone, guilt-ridden, neurotic sheriff of Rocky City and brother Wayne was a peace-loving storekeeper who always found ways to come to his brother's rescue without letting anyone know it. The plot possibilities were endless. These 59 stories in *All Star Western* #58-116 are sheer fun.

Strong Bow, another Tarzan-like Indian character that defied stereotypes, was an imaginative series set before the arrival of the white man. Strong Bow, the last of his tribe after they were wiped out in a massacre, dedicated his life to restoring peace between warring tribes after emerging from "the land beyond the Misty Mountains." His ability to work with animals and nature provided fodder for unusual plots in 42 stories in *All Star Western* #58-99. His cover appearances on #59, 61, 62 and 63 are highly collectible.

After Pow-Wow Smith regrettably disappeared with the demise of *Western Comics*, Infantino was shifted to the last three issues of *All Star Western* to draw Super Chief in #117 through #119 (Jun/Jul 1961). This unusual strip featured Flying Stag, an Indian blessed by Manitou with a magic amulet from a meteor, giving him super powers. He made a mask and costume from a black buffalo and fought evil in the Indian world of long ago.



All Star Western #102 (Sep 1958), a great Gil Kane wash cover.

The last three issues of *All Star* also featured Madame .44, the Outlaw Queen, in the Johnny Thunder strip. It was part of a late '50s-early '60s DC trend of adding exotic female characters such as Liberty Belle in Tomahawk, Mademoiselle Marie in *Star Spangled War Stories*, Supergirl in *Action Comics*, Lori Lemaris in Superman, Batwoman, Batgirl, Hawkwoman and Lady Blackhawk, among others.

Madame .44 turned out to be a female Robin Hood, challenging Johnny Thunder's straight-laced interpretations of the law. They find themselves forced to work together in all three stories. The reader learns that Madame .44 is "lady photographer Jeanne Walker" but is still left hanging in the final story. In the last panel, Jeanne and Johnny are walking toward each other, aware of an incriminating bruise on Johnny's left cheek and a powder burn on Jeanne's left wrist. "Don't miss the surprising sequel to this story in the next issue of *All Star Western*," read the blurb, and I eagerly searched for an issue that never appeared.

In retrospect, there was a clue as to why in #117—the first time DC circulations were listed in statements of ownership was in 1961, and the total in #117 was listed as 154,000, very low at the time. So, ironically, the last issue of *All Star Western* provided frustration similar to that of the final issue of *All Star Comics* ten years earlier!

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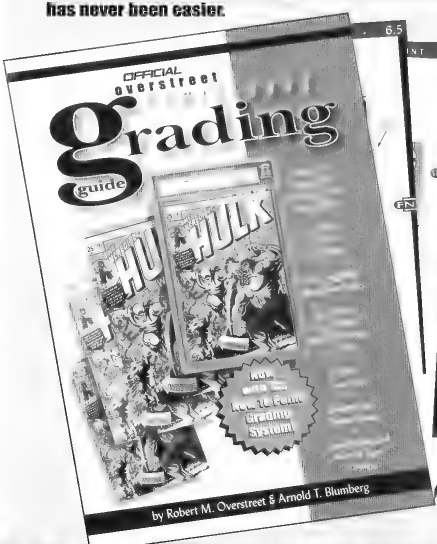

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The Cowhero Age

by Will Murray

No one ever talks about it, but between the Golden and Silver Age of Comics lies a fabulous half-documented era. Called the Atom Age of Comics by some, it was a time when EC horror, true crime and romance comics filled the four-color gap while the super-heroes slept.

It's true that those other genres were at their height back then, but I never saw the 1947-56 period as any kind of Atom Age. To me, it will always be the Cowhero Age of Comics.

Before 1946, you could hardly find a cowboy in the Four-Color Forest. Super-heroes ruled. Yet two of the first original titles were westerns. Centaur launched *Star Ranger* in 1937. Despite changing its title to *Cowboy Comics*, it didn't last out the year. At virtually the same time, Comic Magazine Company put out *Western Picture Stories*. Though it featured the art of Will Eisner, it only lasted for four issues.

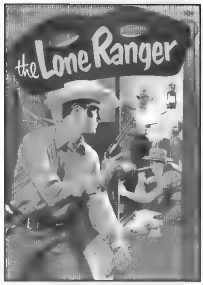
True, the Lone Ranger flourished from the time Dell launched the first *Lone Ranger* comic in 1939—but he was a superstar. He ruled the roost in every medium he rode through—radio, serials, newspaper strips and boy's books. If matchbook covers told stories, he would have been the undisputed king of matchbook covers.

Fred Harmon's Red Ryder started off in comic strips, which were reprinted in several comic books before Dell gave him his own book in 1940. But he was another multi-media creation, not a comic book star in his own right.

Comic books turned to the cowboy for salvation out of sheer desperation. After World War II, the super-hero just conked out. The novelty was lost. Having tasted real war, returning GIs lost their taste for fantasy. Sales slumped. Super-heroes were blamed, even though the real reason came down to a simple fact. Soldiers in uniform read comics to pass the time. As civilians, they were too busy starting careers and families to bother with comic books.

So comics publishers were forced to experiment. Well,

# of Comics

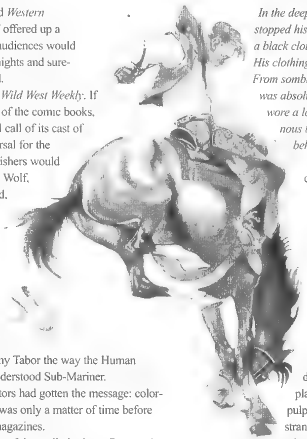


where do you go from Superman? This is no up. He's Superman!

So they looked to the pulps. It's not surprising. Most of the big comics houses—DC, Timely, Street & Smith, Nedor, Ace and Fawcett—had published pulp magazines. And if you published pulps, you published western pulps.

If the pulp magazines offered a quintessential hero, it was the US cowboy. Western pulps were the perennial best-sellers in the action field. It all started in 1919 when Street & Smith launched *Western Story Magazine*. Every week, *WSM* offered up a fat slab of cowheroes. You'd think audiences would have gotten tired of roving range knights and sure-shooting sheriffs, but they never did.

In 1927, Street & Smith put out *Wild West Weekly*. If there is a blueprint for the cowboys of the comic books, look no further than *WWW*. The roll call of its cast of characters sounds like a dress rehearsal for the kind of cow-characters comics publishers would later unleash with a vengeance: Kid Wolf, The Oklahoma Kid, The Sonora Kid, Flame Burns, Flash Moran, Johnny Forty-Five, Silver Jack Steele, Pistol Pete Rice, Sonny Tabor, Senor Red Mask, The Border Eagle. They even pioneered the concept of the crossover, which they called "combine" stories. Periodically, Sheriff Pete Rice and others would tangle with the accused outlaw Sonny Tabor the way the Human Torch later scrapped with the misunderstood Sub-Mariner.



By the early 1930s, the pulp editors had gotten the message: colorful cowboys were the way to go. It was only a matter of time before some started starring in their own magazines.

Which brings us back to the king of them all, the Lone Ranger. A creation of Fran Striker, the Ranger started on radio in 1933 as a laughing cowboy version of Errol Flynn's Zorro. Over time, he settled down to the grim gun-wizard we all know and admire to this day.

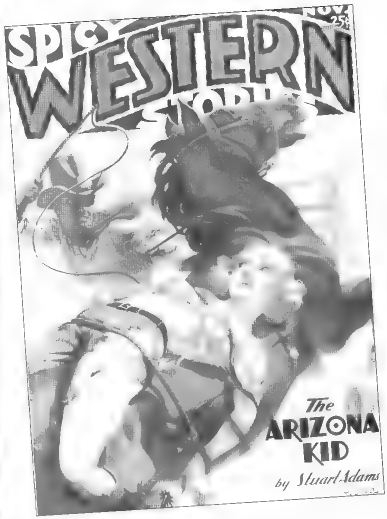
I don't know for a certainty if the Masked Rider was created as a deliberate imitation of the Lone Ranger of radio. Ranger Publications put him out early in 1934, just months after the Lone Ranger's radio debut. That's kind of quick on the draw for coincidence. There were an amazing number of parallels between the Masked Rider of the Plains and that *other* masked rider. Well, decide for yourself. Here is how author Oscar Schisgall introduced him to readers in the first novel, *The Black Cabellero*:

In the deepest shadows of a few cottonwoods he stopped his horse. His eyes, flaming through twin slits in a black cloth, fixed their gaze on the isolated building. His clothing presented a perfect symphony in black From sombrero to boots, including his mask, his apparel was absolutely uncompromising in its blackness. He wore a long cloak, which flowed over him in voluminous black folds. When he rode fast it billowed out behind him like the wings of a bat.

Not convinced? Try this. In reality a roving cowpoke named Wayne Morgan, the Masked Rider rode a black stallion named Midnight. His trusty saddlepard was a Mexican-Yaqui Indian named Blue Hawk. No one knew his true identity. His mission was a self-appointed one. cowboy around and dispense Judge Colt-style justice.

Ranger Publications didn't survive the Depression. In 1938, the Thrilling Group took it over. They made him even more a clone of the Lone Ranger when he got rid of the *mantilla* cloak and full-face mask. A domino mask just like the Ranger's took its place. The Lone Ranger did finally get his own pulp. I would love to know the story behind the strange shotgun marriage between the most moral and upright cowhero that ever was and Harry Donenfeld's Trojan Publications, which also published the likes of *Spicy Western Stories*.

Launching in 1937, the pulp ran unbylined Lone Ranger novels—really novelizations of the daily Lone Ranger radio serials Controversy still surrounds these stories, which some diehard fans insist were written by Fran Striker himself. More than likely *Lone Ranger Magazine* editor Samuel Bierman had the thankless task of

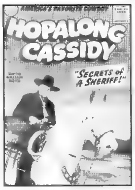


converting the radio scripts into pulp fiction.

We'll never know why the Lone Ranger pulp was dropped after only a year. Maybe the licenser realized the same presses that were turning out *Spicy Western Stories* were also spitting out their wholesome hero. More likely, Lone Ranger fans just weren't interested in reading adventures they could hear for free on the radio. The start of the Golden Age of Comics took readers away from the pulps, and had an impact too.

Which brings us full circle to the closing days of the Golden Age.

It's hard to say when the Cowhero Age truly began. Perhaps the first false dawn of that coming era was Magazine Enterprises' 1946 trial balloon, *Cowboys 'N' Injuns* It was a bizarre concept —a funny animal western. It bombed.



"Fawcett's *Hopalong Cassiday* came along that same year. Fawcett had fooled around with a Hoppy book during the war, but it was cancelled because of paper rationing. But Bill Boyd's portrayal of Hoppy kept burning up the silver screen, so the idea was revived. To everyone's astonishment, sales soared into the millions of copies. Before long, Fawcett was releasing a string of photo-cover comic books featuring the likes of B-movie buckaroos like Tom Mix, Rocky Lane, Lash LaRue and Sunset Carson. Even comic sidekick Gabby Hayes got his own book. This was not a new idea. Dell had been publishing *Roy Rogers* since 1944, replete with trademark photo covers. But Hoppy became a cultural phenomenon, thanks to Bill Boyd's business smarts. He bought up the 66 Hopalong Cassiday feature films and sold them to TV, which was just starting to infiltrate American homes.

The impact was incredible. Between 1947 and 1948, *Hopalong Cassiday* circulation doubled from four to a stunning eight million copies a month! News that Fawcett was minting money through cowboy comics hit the industry like a bombshell. Early in 1948, DC Comics quietly released *Western Comics*, featuring the Wyoming Kid, and turned *All-American Comics* into *All-American Western*, starring Alex Toth's Johnny Thunder. Hillman ventured into the field with *Desperado, Dead-Eye Western* and *Western Fighters*. It probably should have been titled *Western Gunfighters*, but the first rumblings of pre-Code parental concerns were jangling nerves throughout the field.

Always a follower, Timely's Martin Goodman directed Stan Lee to produce its first western comic, *Two-Gun Kid*, featuring a wandering cowpoke named Clay Harder. Riding the dusty cowtrails, Harder often broke into song like a typical Saturday matinee gunwizard

I've got two guns that bark and roar,

They're shooting day and night!

I got two guns and I wish I had four,

Because I love to fight!

Before 1948 was done, Goodman transmuted the fool's gold of *All-Winners* into *All-Western Winners*, starring the Two-Gun Kid and others.

Everything western must have sold because Goodman and Lee began rounding up entire posses of cowboy heroes. *Kid Colt, Outlaw* was undoubtedly the top hand in terms of longevity But the Black Rider was equally popular, probably because he had a traditional secret identity. Yet another take on the Lone Ranger, the Black Rider had an unusual origin.

The idea first appeared in a Syd Shores story in *Two-Gun Kid* #5, "The Rider of the Owlhoot Trail " Here, it was a one-shot. The Black Rider was unmasked as a rancher's daughter named Kim Leary who was simply sneaking around after some rustlers. Stan Lee must have liked the look and the name because soon an identical-looking character had his own strip in *All-Western Winners*. Instead of a hot-tempered cowgirl under the black bandana, this Black Rider was meek-medico-turned-avenging-gunfighter Doc Masters. Syd Shores also drew this version, which soon got its own title.

By this time, everyone was riding hell-for-leather into the Wild West. Ziff-Davis seemed to copy *Kid Colt* with *Kid Cowboy*. EC took aim at the genre with *Gunfighter*. Toby Press successfully marketed *Billy the Kid*. Ace unleashed *Western Adventure Thrillers*. Avon did *Cow Punchers*, *Wild Bill Hickok* and *Blazing Sixguns*. Fox had *Western Killers*, *Western Thrillers*, *Western Outlaws* and *Western True Crime*. Magazine Enterprises licensed movie cowboy Tim Holt, but it was an obscure Dick Ayers wrangler named the Calico Kid who shot to fame when he donned the spectral garb of the Ghost Rider. ACG released *Blazing West*, which spawned a Ghost Rider clone called the Hooded Horseman, while Timor concocted *Blazing Western*, where Steve Ditko drew his first Western story. Simon and Kirby had a classic hit with *Boy's Ranch* for Harvey.

Everywhere you looked, super-heroes were being booted out of existing titles in favor of the commonplace cowhand. Quality revamped *Crack Comics*, renaming it *Crack Western* in 1949, the same year Harvey transformed the crime-busting *Black Cat* into *Black Cat Western*, with which the Hollywood heroine exchanged her trusty motorcycle for a stallion, and did her detecting in westernized settings. *Prize Comics* became *Prize Western*. Nedor exiled most of their superguys from *Thrilling Comics* and *Exciting Comics*. Both went all western in 1950. By 1951 DC's *All-Star Comics* became *All-Star Western*, to the eternal chagrin of fans of the Justice Society of America, featuring Gil Kane's Trigger Twins and Nighthawk. The only element that survived was Johnny Thunder's name. They gave it to a gunfighter who had started off in *All-American Western*. Some consider this sacrilege the end of the Golden Age of super-heroes, but if you look at it objectively, it was more like the final nail in the coffin

The way things were going, readers probably expected a *Captain Marvel Western Adventures* or a *Tarzan Goes to Texas* before the year was out.

Nothing so wild ever materialized, but the unstoppable stampede continued. Harvey turned a Code-battered horror title called *Witch's Tales* into *Western Witches Tales*. It finally settled down to simply *Western Tales*. Fawcett tried *Cowboy Romances*, while Marvel counterpunched with *Cowboy Love*; Quality tried *Range Romances*, EC did *Saddle Romances* and Fiction House did *Cowgirl Romances*. This spate of romantic Westerns was no fluke. In the pulps, *Ranch Romances* had one of the biggest circulations of any title. Everyone knew it, and this triggered seads of pulp imitations. Once the cowboy took over the

comic book, wranglers who preferred kissing cowgirls to horses were all-but-inevitable. The low point came when Charlton turned *Cowboy Western Comics* into the notorious *Space Western*. They also produced one of the most blatant Lone Ranger rip-offs of all, *The Masked Ranger*, although Farrell's *Lone Rider* came in a very close second.

In the middle of all this, Magazine Enterprises revived *Cowboys 'N' Injuns* as *Cowboys 'N' Indians*. The new title mixed funny animals with violent Wild West exploits. It bombed again. Comic cowboys were not bulletproof, especially if they didn't take themselves seriously.

TV took the cowboy to heart in the early 1950s, and one medium fueled the other. Dell's *Lone Ranger* got a new lease on life. The only difference was that his red shirt turned blue to emulate the new TV Ranger, Clayton Moore.

It's probably too simple to say that comics turned to the cowboy for sales salvation because he was popular on TV. The truth is that with the super-hero genre in eclipse, comic publishers were trying everything. Love comics were hot, but the male readers didn't buy love comics. Crime and horror also sold through the roof, but censorship groups were coming down hard on comics that fostered fantasy and violence

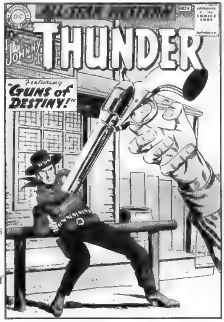
Despite their ultra-high level of violence, westerns proved acceptable. Cowboys were part of the unassailable American myth, and central to our national consciousness. And they were on TV in stark black and white. Who could object? Even the most conservative of them all changed its safe mix of Disney characters and movie adaptations; Dell's Four Color series combined cartoons and cowboys in equal parts.

And so came into being the Cowhero Age of Comics. All of those other hot trends, despite their celebration by collectors, were short-lived when compared to the cowboy craze.

While Fawcett can be rightfully called the champion of movie western comics, Timely-Atlas was the king of original four-color cowboys. To list them all would be pointless, but the house strategy is clear from the proliferation of similar titles: *The Rawhide Kid, The Ringo Kid, The Texas Kid, The Arizona Kid, Kid Slade Gunfighter, The Kid from Texas, The Kid from Dodge City, The Apache Kid, The Western Kid* and *The Outlaw Kid*. Only a few stood out. The Ringo Kid became a real rival to Kid Colt, thanks to Joe Maneeley's superb artwork. Doug Wildey's Outlaw Kid was a fine example of his rough but realistic style. John Romita cut his artistic teeth on the Western Kid. But Kid Colt enjoyed the longest run, thanks to its teenager-on-the-run theme, first perfected in real life by Billy the Kid and made a pulp formula in the pages of *Wild West Weekly*.

None of these characters were in any sense original. You can find Rawhide Kids, Kid Colts, Two-Gun Kids, Wyoming Kids, even a Marijuana Kid in the old pulps. Same names, different characters, but the true distinctions were slim.

With rare exceptions, no pulp cowhero ever made the leap into comic books. The Thrilling Group's Masked Rider ran in *Exciting Comics*, but while based on the pulp character, he had a different true identity. The same outfit's Jim Hatfield, Texas Ranger and Rio Kid also filled out their super-hero titles. Street & Smith revived their dime novel plainsman, Buffalo Bill, as well as Pistol Pete Rice of the pulps, but never issued a western comic until *Buffalo Bill Picture Stories* in 1949, the year S&S abruptly folded its pulp and comic book lines. Doug Wildey got his start drawing Buffalo Bill. Martin Goodman's Masked Raider sank without a trace in early issues of *Marvel Mystery Comics*. It's possible he had a prior pulp incarnation, but it's never been discovered.



One of the unintended consequences of the Cowhero Age of

(continued on page 80)

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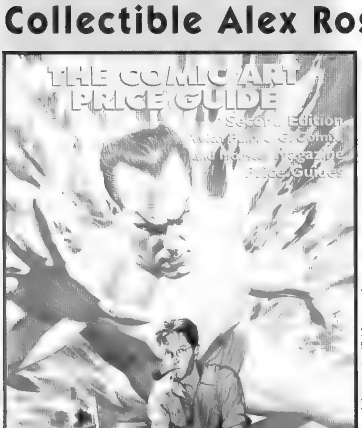

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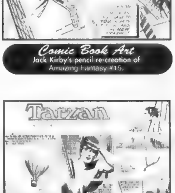
Comic Book Art
Jack Kirby's pencil re-creation of Amazing Fantasy #15.



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Comic Strip Art
1942 Tarzan Sunday page, hand-colored by Burne Hogarth.

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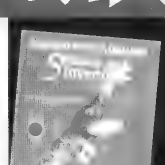

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A Ramblin' Look at
Cowboyin' in Strips

On the Hall of Statues just off the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., each state is permitted to place statues of two of its native sons whose lives or works were somehow worthy of enshrining. These bronzed personages on pedestals include the usual assortment of patriots—of Washington, Lincoln, Jefferson, Robert E. Lee, and so on. Exactly the kind of roll call you'd expect. Until you get to Charles M. Russell.

Since you're holding this magazine in your hands, you probably have a nodding acquaintance with Russell, the self-taught "cowboy artist" whose depictions of the Old West in watercolor, oil, pen-and-ink, and in clay and bronze sculptures are highly regarded for their authenticity, and for their sense of humor. Before he became famous as an artist, Charlie hunted and trapped, herded cows and broke broncs.

One winter, he lived in Canada with the Blood Indians, who gave him the name "Ah-wah-cous," or "antelope" (possibly because the pattern of his riding breeches in the back reminded them of the south end of an antelope running north). Charlie always spoke of Indians as the only "real Americans," and he was an early conservationist and environmentalist (before there was such a term).

As far as I know, Russell's is the only statue of an artist in the Capitol. Fittingly, the only artist monumentalized in the

Here, in self-portrait, is Charlie Russell with a few of his friends—including four of the cowboy artist's most avid admirers: at the left, me and my rabbit and Rick O'Shay; at the right, Hipshot Percussion himself. At least the latter two, Charlie would surely have savvied just fine.

Tom Mix by James Montgomery Flagg from the pages of the old **Life** (humor magazine) in the spring of 1927—a pretty good depiction of the sort of movie star cowboy the ol' fraud was.

The Pfuefer-Jordan Tom Mix.

Capitol is a cowboy artist: the West, after all, is the most distinctive aspect of American cultural history, and the history of the country's expansion into the West—and the legends and lore associated with that expansion—is the nation's mythology.

We call this mythology "the Western." The classic formula—a lone sometime gunman rides into town and single-handedly defeats the land-hungry mogul or the marauding band of bad guys—the formula embodies the spirit of the American experiment. Like the American political experiment, the Western champions the individual: the former guarantees his rights; the latter trumpets his prowess, his fitness.

Mythology is the made-up folk version of history, and, fittingly enough, two famous persons intimately associated with the West are made-up people. They invented themselves, and in so doing, they made themselves the heroes of their own personal mythologies. But under the gloss of literary invention, they were both hoaxes.

One of them—a magnificently appropriate happenstance, a colossal stroke of pure poetic justice—was the first King of the Celluloid Cowboys, a champion fraud in the tinsel capital of make-believe. Tom Mix (1880-1940).

Mix was, above all else, a showman. In his movies, he created with flash and action and costume, the movie cowboy. The power of the motion picture lies in its ability to blur the line between reality and illusion, and Mix set about doing just that. His big screen personality defined the future for the Hollywood Western.

In comic books, the Mix legend was perpetuated by Fawcett in *Tom Mix Western* (1947-1953). It was a memorable performance, arguably the best work ever by Carl Pfuefer teamed with inker John Jordan—lively, energetic action on every page. And Pfuefer could draw Tom Mix to look exactly like Tom Mix. (If you want a taste of this visual feast, check the backlist at AC Comics, PO Box 1216, Longwood, FL 32752; Bill Black and his henchmen have revived the Pfuefer-Jordan Tom Mix in an assortment of reprint titles.)

The other famous Western fraud was a cowboy artist like Russell. Neither ever made it to comic books, but Will James (1892-1942) wrote stories, books of them—which he illustrated himself. He wrote the books in a fabricated lingo that suggested, with artificially induced bad grammar and country syntax, that the author was a somewhat less-than-educated person—like a real cowboy, in other words. But James' jargon was as phony as his own personal history.

One of his most celebrated prose works is *The Lone Cowboy*, which James asserts is his "life story." According to the book, James was born in a covered wagon in Montana. He was orphaned at an early age and subsequently raised by a French-Canadian trapper named Bopy, with whom he wandered the Judith Basin in Montana, learning how to survive and how to draw.

I read this tome as a youth. Avidly. Hungrily. I was growing up in Denver, a West somewhat different than that of the Lone Cowboy's, admittedly; but I'd just figuratively apprenticed myself to Dick Sebald, who was producing a

Fictional Will James as a boy in Judith Basin, Montana.

My first glimpse of Balin' Wire Bill.

quaint weekly masterpiece of cartoonery that humorously retailed the amusing "doin's" of an ordinary cowpoke named Balin' Wire Bill on his one-steer spread at Broken Spoke, Wyo. ("Apprenticeships" among cartoonists entail nothing more exotic than copying religiously the work of an admired cartoonist.)

Will James and Dick Sebald and Balin' Wire Bill and me—we all seemed pointed in the same direction, and I devoured the paragraphs in *The Lone Cowboy* about James' artistic aspirations and exercises. Wonderful stuff.

All invented. Well, the French-Canadian trapper and orphan stuff anyhow. Will James was actually born in Canada and raised in a French-speaking household in and around Montreal. He fell in love with cowboying at an early age and left home, with his parents' blessing, at the age of fifteen (after completing an education) to spend three years in western Canada, learning the cowboy trade and how to speak English. At eighteen (or about 1910), he crossed the border to the U.S., realizing that only in the American West could he be a real cowboy.

He bummed around the West for the next decade, rustled some cattle, spent a year or so in jail for it, and drew pictures a lot. He also told stories, and when he wrote down the story of his life with a horse named Smoky and submitted it to a magazine, his career as an artist-author took off. He didn't survive fame well: he drank himself to death by the age of fifty.

Despite all the make-believe, Tom Mix and Will James had actual accomplishments to point to. Mix's daring as his own stunt man probably equaled anything he claimed to have done as a soldier of fortune. And he created, as I said, the Hollywood cowboy hero, which, more than any other version, established the Western as our mythology.

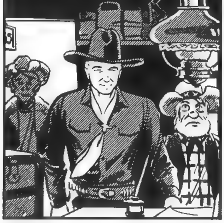
Meanwhile, Will James, in manufacturing his own past, created one of the most luminous portraits of the West and of living the great adventure in it that our literature affords. And his pictures of cowboys and, particularly, of horses in the old West are festooned with authenticity. Because most of his artwork illustrated his books, he left far fewer color paintings than did that other painter of the West, Charlie Russell, but the genuineness of James' work is in the same league.

To speak of fraud when discussing the Western is to describe the American mythology, after all. As I said earlier, the lone champion of that myth is a piece of fiction, a literary construct, as much make-believe as Will James or Tom Mix. But myths are like that—engaging, absorbing, and their truth, like Will James' and Tom Mix's, is in the make-believe.

But even in make-believe, even on the funnies page, I opt for authenticity. Russell over Remington, say. Admirers of western artists usually pit Remington against Russell, and, while I admire Remington, I love Russell. Frederic Remington (1861-1909), like Russell, was born in the East—Canton, New York, though, not St. Louis—but unlike Russell, Remington never lived in the West. He just visited there. And while visiting, he took copious notes in the form of sketches of the indigenous population which he subsequently turned into a visual record of the West, a remarkably accurate and detailed portrait, albeit focused mostly on the occupation forces (U.S. cavalry), trib-

SAGE SAND & SALT
AS WORE NEW REPORTER FROM BROKEN-SPOKE WHOOMIN' —,
I FIGGER WE SHOULD SORTA' GIT ACQUAINTED HERE —.
SALUKS —, THEM' JEST AIN'T A WHOLE LOT OF RIP-ROARIN'
'SHOOT 'EM UP', EXCITEMENT IN THESE PARTS, SO —
WE MAKE BIG EVENTS —
HOWDY FOLKS!!
OUTTA' LITTLE THINGS!!
AND —,
AS YOU KIN PLAINLY SEE —,
WE JEST DON'T TAKE ANYTHING TOO SERIOUSLY (NOT EVEN PISSIN'!!)
WE SHORE HOPE YOU'LL LIKE IT —
BALIN' WIRE BILL & THE GANG —ET

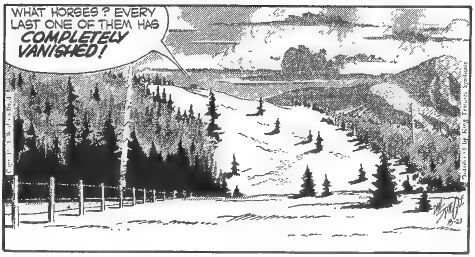
The first of Bill's weekly "letters."



Dan Spiegle's Hoppy (detail).

al costume, and fur trapping. Not many cowboys. And Remington had never pushed cows through a frozen winter as Russell had done.

Russell over Remington. And Red Ryder over Hopalong Cassidy.



Spiegle's use of Craftint doubletone rivaled Roy Crane's proficiency with it.

The gimpy trouble prone redheaded saddle bum of Clarence Mulford's novels about the boys at the Bar-20 ranch lost limp and all semblance of scruffiness when transformed by William Boyd into the black-garbed silver-haired Hoppy of the silver screen and, later, TV. The novels had a flavor of the old West; the movies, of the "new" West—that is, Hollywood.

Boyd had the perspicacity to acquire ownership of the 54 Hopalong Cassidy films he'd starred in from 1935 to 1943, and when TV kicked in across the country, he made a fortune exhibiting the old films and the new ones he subsequently made. And in 1949, no doubt seeking diversity in merchandising options for the character, Boyd decided to take his version of Hoppy into newspaper comics.

At just about this moment, a young artist and WWII Navy veteran named Dan Spiegle, having exhausted his share of the G.I. Bill with three years' study at the Chouinard Institute of Art in Los Angeles, was hoping to sell a cowboy comic strip he'd concocted. A chance encounter with the brother-in-law of one of Boyd's managers led to a meeting with Boyd. As Mark Evanier tells it, quoting Spiegle:

"I was very fortunate to find Bill Boyd in an agreeable mood, and he really liked the way I drew horses. He said it didn't matter how I drew him—that would come with practice—but you could either draw horses or you couldn't."

Spiegle was soon hired, and *Hopalong Cassidy* started January 4, 1950. Written at first by Dan Grayson, one of Boyd's minions, and later by Royal King Cole, it ran until 1955, but it was Spiegle's art that distinguished the strip. He

LAST LEG OF A LONG OL' TRAIL, LITTLE BEAVER!
YOU BETCHUM, RED RYDER, BUT MAYBE TROUBLE CATCHUM UP WITH ZEKE AL-READY!
CRAIGIN FREEL SAYMER/MUD SADDLE PROPERTY KEEP OFF
DERE RED: GOT A HEAD OF TROUBLE DOWN CRATER CREEK. HOAP YOU HELP. Zeke.
3-27

The opening panel of the first **Red Ryder** daily strip, March 27, 1939.

started off good, and he got better and better. Said Evanier: "Gil Kane later called it the best-drawn western strip of all time."

The *Denver Post* started publishing it right from the start. I was smitten with Spiegle's artwork, its spare linear quality, the vastness of the desert horizons across which Hoppy rode, and the increasingly sophisticated use of Craftint gray tones. He achieved an almost photographic tonal gradation sometimes, occasionally even leaving off defining outlines.

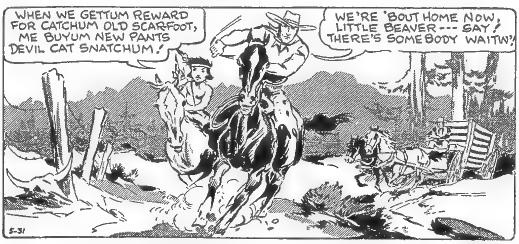
But further down the comics page in the *Post* was Fred Harman's *Red Ryder*, and it had a knottier reality that I recognized from my own rambles through hillside stands of shaggy pine trees and straggly juniper bushes.

Red wore chaps (not always but often) and looked bowlegged. And all the fences at his ranch and the boardwalks of his hometown, Rimrock, looked like real wood, weathered and warped, and the wheels on wagons almost certainly wobbled. At my first encounter with Red, I thought his jaw was too large and his shock of red hair too unruly, but I could never fault Harman for the picture of the West he drew.

Harman (1902-1982) was born in St. Joseph, Missouri, but his father took the family to his ranch near Pagosa Springs, Colorado, shortly thereafter, and Fred grew up on a horse. That'll give you a real feel for the old West. The Harmans were in Kansas City for a couple years spanning World War I, and Fred returned to the big city again in 1920, learning animation with Ub Iwerks and Walt Disney at Kansas City Film Ad Company. But when Disney went to California in 1923, Harman stayed in Missouri. (His brother, Hugh, worked for Disney in California, then partnered with Rudolph Ising to produce Merrie Melodies and Happy Harmonies, a series of musically accompanied cartoons from the propitiously dubbed Harman-Ising Studio. Say it aloud.)

GUN FIGHT, RED RYDER! WE BETTER VAMOOSE FROM NUGGET CITY!
LOOKS LIKE A SALOON BRAWL, LITTLE BEAVER! GREAT SCOTT-- A BYSTANDER WAS SHOT!
SALOON

Harman's heroes were often depicted on horseback, giving the strip an authentic feel not often achieved in any other Western strip.


WHEN WE GETTUM REWARD FOR CATCHUM OLD SCARFOOT, ME BUYUM NEW PANTS DEVIL CAT SNATCHUM!
WE'RE 'BOUT HOME NOW, LITTLE BEAVER--- SAY! THERE'S SOMEBODY WAITIN'!

Horses may not, in actuality, tilt like motorcycles when cornering, but Harman's horses did, and the visual device enhanced the sense of movement. Fence posts, sagebrush, and Craftint pines and mountains in the distance gave the strip an almost palpable ambiance.

Harman didn't linger in Missouri long: for the next ten years or so, he wandered through California, Iowa, Minnesota and California again before settling near Pagosa Springs. During one of his sojourns in California, he met Will James.

"He and I had some memorable times together," the cartoonist once recalled. Probably. By the mid-1930s when Harman met him, James was famous as a best-selling author, but he was also drinking with great determination.

In 1934, still in California, Harman began self-syndicating a comic strip called *Bronc Peeler*. He scarcely made a living at it, but the strip attracted the attention of an agent who eventually sold the idea of a western strip to NEA. Living in New York where he'd unsuccessfully auditioned to succeed Allen Dean on Zane Grey's *King of the Royal Mounted*, Harman reincarnated Bronc as Red Ryder, carrying over into the new strip Bronc's Navajo kid sidekick, Little Beaver, whose Injun

Here's Red astride his horse, Thunder, catching up on his mail at Harman's Red Ryder Ranch near Pagosa Springs, Colorado.

pidgin ("You betchum, Red Ryder" would become a byword) was about the only Hollywood fakery in the strip.

Set in the 1890s, *Red Ryder* started on Sunday, November 6, 1938 (a daily was added five months later on March 27) and eventually ran in 750 newspapers. It was unquestionably the most popular of the newsprint Westerns: the redhead entered the cinematic log 22 times, and Harman, who returned to Pagosa Springs in 1940 and started the Red Ryder Ranch, became a Colorado celebrity and radio personality.

The *Red Ryder* comic book debuted with a single issue in September 1940, appeared sporadically August 1941-December 1943, then bimonthly until January 1946, when it began a monthly schedule until it ceased in April 1957 with No. 151. Harman reportedly drew Red's adventures for the first 99 issues, which, in their earliest manifestations, included short comical material, a juvenile gang feature called "Kiyote Kids," and reprints of the *King of the Royal Mounted* strip as well as separate stories about Red Ryder and Little Beaver.

By the mid-1950s, Harman was phasing out of drawing the strip; in the 1960s, he took up oil painting seriously, producing scenes evocative of Russell and helping found the Cowboy Artists of America. The strip, produced at the end by Bob McLeod, trailed off in December 1964.

Only J.R. Williams, something of a range-riding veteran himself, could rival Harman for authentic reek. But Williams' single-panel cartoon, *Out Our Way* (1921-1977), which regularly but not exclusively featured cowboying, hadn't Harman's graphic energy. Harman's horses in particular were dynamos, prancing restlessly and rearing up at the slightest provocation. Williams' weary cowpokes didn't change their shirts all that often, I'm sure, but Harman was the old West with knotholes and bowed legs.

Harman drew with a juicy brush, splashing his drawings through the panels in a fluid, sketchy manner and drenching them in black shadow. Realistically for a Western, Red was on horseback much of the time, and Harman could make his hero sit a horse convincingly. Not having studied the situation like Harman, I can't say with authority that horses tilt like motorcycles when cornering, but that's the way Harman drew them, and, realistic or not, it imparted to the equestrian sequences a dramatic sense of movement, and, with that, visual excitement.

Perhaps the most spectacular of the comic strip Westerns were the two produced by Warren Tufts, *Casey Ruggles* Sunday and daily (1949-1954), and *Lance*, a stunning full-page Sunday (1955-1957). Tufts' stories were realistic, even brutally so sometimes, but Casey, a freelance lawman wandering the West (mostly California), and Lance, an officer in the U.S. cavalry, wore meticulously pressed duds, freshly laundered every day. Tufts' artwork was expert and elegant—Alex Raymond in a broad-brimmed hat but still a fashion plate—and altogether admirable, inspiring a cult-like devotion among aficionados of the medium, but it was too much Hollywood and not enough cook fire smoke and wood ash.

CASEY RUGGLES ®
By Warren Tufts
WHERE'D YOU LEARN TO RIDE? WE DIDN'T THINK YOU KNOWED WHICH END OF THE HORSE WAS UP!
THAT'S WHAT I HOPED YOU'D THINK. I COME FROM A LONG LINE OF CONNECTICUT FOX HUNTERS!
O' COURSE, CASE, YOU DIDN'T GIVE IT EVERYTHING YOU HAD OR YOU'D O' BEAT JULIE IN THE HORSEMANSHIP CONTEST.
OF COURSE!
OF COURSE!
I STILL DON'T THINK YOU'D GO WRONG — MARRYING THE GIRL!
WE'RE BUDDIES AND THAT'S AS FAR AS I'M GOING! AFTER I PUT HER THROUGH A FEW HAIR-RAISING EXPERIENCES SHE'LL FLY BACK EAST!

Warren Tufts' elegant **Casey Ruggles**, always well-pressed and freshly washed.

For the last of the Western strip realists, we go to Stan Lynde, who came along right about the time Harman was losing interest in the linear Old West.

Born in 1931 in Billings, Montana, Lynde grew up on a ranch near Lodge Grass on the Crow Indian reservation where his father raised sheep. After graduating from high school, Lynde went to the University of Montana in Missoula for a year and then found himself in the Navy during the Korean War. He served in the personnel office on Guam, and there he created his first regularly published comic strip. Running daily in the base newspaper, *Ty Foon* featured the misadventures of the title character, a hilariously lucky sailor, and an assorted supporting cast.

NEVER'VE BEEN LONG ON WORDS... I GENERALLY LET MAH IRONS TALK FER ME...
WHAT YOU'VE JEST SEEN IS OL' HIPSHOT'S WAY OF INTRODUCIN' HISSELF... FRIENDLY-LIKE...
FRIENDLY, HE SAYS!
YOU KNOW.. YOU'RE A GOOD MAN AT HEART..
..BUT DON'T WORRY ..I WON'T TELL ANYBODY!
JES' FIGGERED YOU ORTER KNOW, RICK...THE WHOLE TERRITORY'S OUT HUNTIN' $EARCAT...
WANTED
CLAUDE HOPPER'S HEADIN' UP A SETTLERS' POSSE...AN' THE CAVALRY'S TOOK THE FIELD TOO..
ALL THEM FOLKS AFTER ONE LITTLE INDIAN? HOW COME?
RECKON THEY'RE JES' $CARED, RICK...YOU KNOW HOW IT IS WHEN PANIC SETS IN..
..PEOPLE FLING CAUTION...AN COMMON $ENSE.. TO THE WINDS..
STAN LYNDE

Through the years, Stan Lynde's **Rick O'Shay** lost its satirical big-foot comedy aspect and became increasingly realistic. Here, at the upper left, two panels from Hipshot's debut in the strip's second week (with Rick and Deuces Wilde, the town gambler); then two panels from 1962 (four years later); and, finally, an entire strip from 1971.

Lynde was having such a good time doing the strip that when his 18-month tour was up, he requested, and received, a 6-month extension. When finally discharged in 1955, he worked for a time as a newspaper reporter and artist in Colorado Springs, Colorado, then trekked off to New York to try his luck. Unable to sell his strip about Navy life despite the trailblazing done by Mort Walker's *Beetle Bailey* for the Army, Lynde fell back on his typing skills to survive, enrolled in the School of Visual Arts, and, with the rest of the nation, watched TV in his spare moments.

By this time, 1957, the Western commanded prime time on television. For at least an hour (sometimes two) every evening, cowboys and Indians and gunfighters and rustlers galloped across the tiny screen. This was the year of *Maverick, Restless Gun, Cheyenne, Tombstone Territory, Wagon Train, Zorro, Colt .45, Gunsmoke, Have Gun Will Travel*, and even *Sgt. Preston of the Yukon*.

Lynde, long enthralled by the romance and glamour of the West, had yearned, at one time, to do a Western along the lines of Hal Foster's *Prince Valiant* or Tufts' *Casey Ruggles* or his later *Lance*. Historical. Pretty much a serious adventure.

But it didn't work out that way, Lynde told me when we talked several years ago: "By 1957," he said, "I had decided to produce a feature which would satirize the fictional Western, the TV Western, from the standpoint of the authentic West in which I'd grown up, taking the Western conventions and stereotypes of fiction and standing them on their heads. So *Rick O'Shay* began May 19, 1958 as a spoof on the synthetic West, or what Gary Cooper used to call 'easterners in big hats.'

"The Western wasn't all that hot with syndicate editors then in spite of all those television shows. I ran into that opposition, very definite prejudice against Westerns on the part of a number of syndicate editors to whom I submitted my stuff before Tribune Media Services [then the Chicago Tribune-New York Daily News Syndicate] accepted it."

It was Maurice "Moe" Reilly who made the decision for TMS, hoping *Rick O'Shay* would replace Ferd Johnson's *Texas Slim* in many newspapers' line-ups. (Johnson was dropping his cowboy comedy romp, which he had invented in 1926, stopped in 1929, and resumed in 1940, in order to take over *Moon Mullins* for Frank Willard, who died early in 1958.) Reilly nurtured both *Rick O'Shay* and its creator, as Lynde recounts in his memoir, *Rick O'Shay, Hipshot and Me*.

The sequences of the strip reprinted in the book show how dramatically *Rick O'Shay* changed over its twenty-year run. Unique in the history of the funnies, it began as a mock Western taking place in the mid-20th century and then evolved into a realistic saga set in the old West. I asked Lynde how that happened.

"I think probably it goes back to what I'd originally planned," he said. "I'd wanted to do an illustrative fairly authentic not a big-foot type art style, and eventually it sort of eased that way. I did a lot of learning. And the readers themselves urged me on. At first the strip was something of an anachronism. It dealt with the twentieth century intruding upon this sleepy little Montana town. But the readers tended to want their West to be the Old West. And I kept hearing that, and finally I thought to myself, 'That's what I want too.' So in the late sixties I adopted a centennial theme: if it was 1969, it was 1869 in the strip. And I kept that going.

"Once we were in the Old West," he continued, "I felt I had to be authentic about it. Again back to Russell: Russell sort of set the standard."

Once *Rick O'Shay* turned realistic, the satiric West was left entirely to T.K. Ryan and his anachronistic

Tumbleweeds. But that's another story for another day.

From the beginning, *Rick O'Shay* was tightly rendered with a crisp line and judiciously spotted blacks, and as the strip became more realistic, Lynde preserved his style but increased his workload: tightly rendered wrinkles and authentic background details take time, and Lynde took on assistants (among them, Russ Heath).

"One of my frustrations," Lynde said, "has always been that the prevailing wisdom on the part of newspaper editors or TV or movie people is that Westerns don't work. Then we get a good one like *Lonesome Dove*, and everyone says, well, yeah—Hey, that works. Well, Westerns do work if you do them right and authentically."

Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* was one of those successful Westerns. And it was influenced by *Rick O'Shay*. Lynde noted one striking similarity: "There was one scene in *Unforgiven* where the Eastwood character was shooting at a tin can and missing and finally goes back for his shotgun, which came from a Sunday page I'd done in *Rick*. In fact, I'd done it a couple times, with different punchlines. A friend suggested that I send one to Eastwood with a note saying, Saw *Unforgiven*—and I forgive you," he finished with a laugh.

Lynde left *Rick O'Shay* in 1977, and in 1979, he launched *Latigo* on June 25. *Latigo* was an unabashed serious, realistic, historically accurate Western strip, but it lasted only four years, ending May 7, 1983. Since then, Lynde has concentrated on novel writing—three so far (*The Bodacious Kid*, its sequel *Careless Creek*, and, just out, *Vigilante Moon*) with a fourth underway. And he also produced a panel cartoon, *Grass Roots*, about a couple of Montana ranchies who comment on the passing scene, and a two-issue comic book series, *The Price of Fame*, in which Hipshot is challenged by young gunfighters who seek fame by besting him in a shootout.

All of *Latigo* has been reprinted in three volumes, and a *Rick O'Shay* reprint project is up to 1964 with four volumes. All are available from Mountain Press Publishing (PO Box 2399, Missoula, MT 59806 or www.MountainPress.com or 1-800-234-5308).

Another of those paper-and-ink cowpokes who seemed to me steeped in authenticity was the aforementioned Balin' Wire Bill—an unknown, I'm sure, if ever one wandered in off the prairie, scuffing the cow-pie off'n his boots as he crossed the front stoop and smilin' a shy smile. Unless you grew up in the so-called "Rocky Mountain Region" as proclaimed and defined by the *Denver Post*, you probably never heard of Balin' Wire Bill. So, let me change that forever. Return with me to the days of yesteryear. Out of the past come the hoof beats of the cow pony Kate…

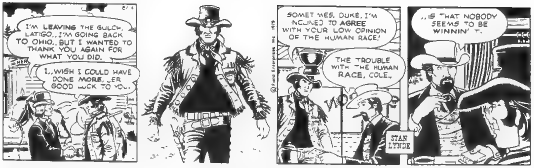
Somewhere in this vicinity is the first drawing I ever saw of Balin' Wire Bill. I clipped the drawing but neglected to clip the news story that accompanied it. Now, yellowed with age, it still conjures up fond memories for me of a year spent waiting for Bill's weekly appearances. But without the text that doubtless ran with this faded clipping, I can tell you nothing about Dick Sebald, the man who produced the comic strip that was the favorite of my youth.

RICK O'SHAY
by STAN LYNDE
MEDICINE COLLINS
UH, WAS YOU A FRIEND O' CHARLIE B.? I THOUGHT I KNEW MOST O' HIS PARTNERS.
YEP, HE WAS JUST ABOUT THE BIGGEST MAN AN EVER KNEW.
AW? THAT TELLS ME YOU DIDN'T KNOW HIM, BROTHER. CHARLIE WASN'T HARDLY FIVE FEET TALL!
FIVE-TWO AN' A HALF, BUT AH WASN'T TALKIN' ABOUT SIZE..
AH WAS TALKIN' ABOUT HOW BIG HE WAS.

The gunfighter Hipshot eventually emerged as the star of **Rick O'Shay**, and his laconic humor was a staple in the strip.

The drawing speaks volumes, though, of its artist's graphic invention, his playfulness. Notice how the line that makes Bill's eyebrow gets carried away with itself and becomes a string somehow attached to his wrist as he types. Notice the cigarette butts strewn around, signifying that Bill has been agonizing over his composition. Notice the texture of the aged tree trunk and the initials carved thereon.

"CMR" is Russell, and "WR" is doubtless another former wrangler, Will Rogers, one of this country's fabled folksy heroes and humorists. Sebald was clearly evoking the right gods in this drawing—the


I'M LEAVING THE GULCH, LATIGO...I'M GOING BACK TO OHIO. BUT I WANTED TO THANK YOU AGAIN FOR WHAT YOU DID.
I...WISH I COULD HAVE DONE MORE...ER. GOOD LUCK TO YOU.
SOMETIMES, DUKE, I'M INCLINED TO AGREE WITH YOUR LOW OPINION OF THE HUMAN RACE!
THE "DOUBLE WITH" THE HUMAN RACE, COLE.
...IF THAT NOBODY SEEMS TO BE WINNIN'."
STAN LYNDE

Latigo was a serious Western, whose hero, Cole Cantrell, seems to embody some of Rick and some of Hipshot.

CHING
MARSHALL'S OFFICE
AH DO HATE T' COMPLAIN, RICK...BUT THIS COFFEE'S A MITE STRONG, EVEN FOR ME.
IT'S BEEN BREWIN' SINCE THE SPRING OF '77!
IT SHOULD BE. HIP

From the opening sequence of Lynde's two-issue graphic novel, **The Price of Fame**, the reunion of Rick and Hipshot after a 15-year hiatus.

gods of authenticity and humor that he hoped would smile upon his creation, just about to be launched.

Whimsically entitled *Sage, Sand, and Salt*, the strip had humor as its object—not western action or, even, much adventure. In the strip, the contemporary West of the late 1940s found its voice in a weekly "letter" from Balin' Wire Bill. The letter was Sebald's strip. It ran in "Sunday format," several black-and-white panels on two tiers.

Its humor wasn't biting satire; it was folksy. And the artwork wasn't particularly spectacular—although it had a homespun charm, capturing the fustian atmosphere of a one-horse ranch in the modern arid West. But the reason that few are likely to recall this strip is that it ran for less than a year (1949) exclusively in the *Denver Post* Sunday magazine section, *Empire*.

Appearing in a magazine that used halftones permitted cartoonist Sebald to embellish his work with a wash, which he did more and more towards the end of the strip's run, and very effectively, too. I was a passionate fan of Sebald's in those days—and I copied his drawings slavishly. (But I couldn't handle wash, so that aspect of his artistry was merely something to admire.)

I learned how to draw horses by copying "ol' Kate." Sebald drew cartoon horses as well as Russell drew real ones. And he also authoritatively evoked the ambiance of the country—the rocks and trees and shrubs and the fence posts and tangled barbed wire, and the mountains. Not to mention Levis and boots and saddles. I copied it all. I drew a character that was Balin' Wire Bill's spittin' image for a year or more, decorating my schoolbooks and homework papers with pictures of him.

Somewhere along the line, I felt so strongly about the strip that I wrote to Sebald, sending him a drawing of my own. And he responded with a drawing of ol' Bill. My first piece of original art. I've still got it. And it's still framed in the very frame I bought for it fifty-three years ago. Sebald drew his hero on ordinary typing paper, the kind that is almost tissue. Here's Bill, seated on a box and surrounded by heaps of comic books (he was an avid reader of the four-color fables). Sebald drew with blue pencil and red pencil: red, he used for Bill's face and hands (the flesh tones) and the comic books; the rest of the picture is in blue. Alas, it has faded over the years to such a degree that only I, familiar with its outlines, can make out the drawing. But it's still on my wall.

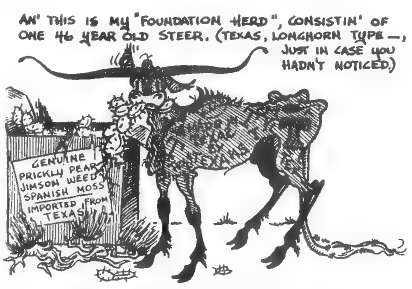
Bill had nice, friendly sorts of adventures. Beginning April 10, 1949, the introductory sequence acquainted us with Bill's ranch and its population—namely, Kate, his horse (hopelessly enamored of Roy Rogers' Trigger), and Tex, the resident obligatory longhorn steer. In the first "story," Bill tries to put his own brand on the already copiously branded Tex. No luck. The savage animal trees Bill, and while up in the tree, Bill tells us how Tex got all those

brands all over his body: he did it himself, plugging one of his horns into an electrical socket, and then using the other end, now charged and hot as a branding iron, to draw the brands all over himself. That way, the steer reasoned, no one could claim him, and he'd be able to run free over the range.

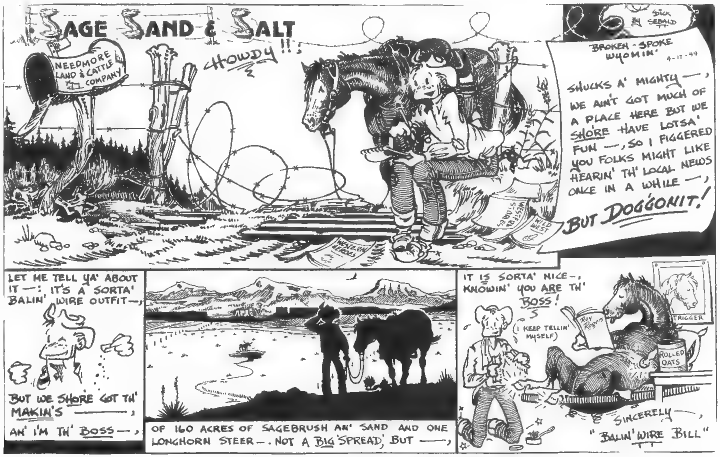
Bill gets out of the tree by singing "Deep in the Heart of Texas," a particular favorite of Tex's, who, overcome by the sentiment of the moment, lets Bill climb down and resume his ordinary life on the ranch.

In other adventures, Bill goes to the famous Cheyenne Frontier Days in July. He buys himself a fancy cowboy suit for the occasion, but Kate is so frightened by the Hollywood outfit that she runs off, so Bill hangs it in the closet and dons his customary jeans. He enters the calf-roping contest, but he's so inept a cowboy that when he ropes a calf, he ties himself up with the piggin' string, not the animal.

Well, you get the idea. My last clipped strip is dated December 11, 1949, and I think that might, indeed, be the last date it ran. It was a short but inspiring run. All make-believe, of course, but, like all Western mythology, not fraudulent at all. ✪


AN' THIS IS MY "FOUNDATION HERD", CONSISTIN' OF ONE 46 YEAR OLD STEER. (TEXAS, LONGHORN TYPE—, JUST IN CASE YOU HADN'T NOTICED)
GENUINE PRICKLY PEAR JIMSON WEED SPANISH MOSS IMPORTED FROM TEXAS

Tex, Bill's resident herd, branded himself so no one else could.


SAGE SAND & SALT
HOWDY!!
NEEDMORE LAND & CATTLE CO. COMPANY
BY SEBALD
"BROKEN-SPOKE WHOMIN'" 4-17-49
SHUCKS A' MIGHTY—, WE AIN'T GOT MUCH OF A PLACE HERE BUT WE SHORE HAVE LOTSA' FUN—, SO I FIGGERED YOU FOLKS MIGHT LIKE HEARIN' TH' LOCAL NEWS ONCE IN A WHILE—,
BUT DOGGONIT!
LET ME TELL YA' ABOUT IT—: IT'S A SORTA' BALIN' WIRE OUTFIT—,
BUT WE SHORE GOT TH' MAKIN'S——,
AN' I'M TH' BOSS—,
OF 160 ACRES OF SAGEBRUSH AN' SAND AND ONE LONGHORN STEER—. NOT A BIG SPREAD, BUT——,
IT IS SORTA' NICE—, KNOWIN' YOU ARE TH' BOSS!
(I KEEP TELLIN' MYSELF)
TRIGGER
OLE-ED OATS
SINCERELY——,
"BALIN' WIRE BILL"

Barbed wire, fence posts, sagebrush, and even a somewhat overgrown cattle guard lend a realistic flavor to Sebald's portrait of the rundown West of 1949.

REVEALED AT LAST!

The previously untold origin of the HAUNTED HORSEMAN,

and the long, strange ride of the GHOST RIDER as told by the celebrated cartoonist,

DICK AYERS

HAUNTED HORSEMAN © & ™ AC COMICS 2002

We could have met like most, digitally, at a small oasis in the new, borderless frontier. Instead we did it live. Actually speaking. To each other. We enjoyed a conversation, even. Which meant that we talked via a wire-bound landline phone, while I recorded it on an ancient pre-digital "tape recorder."

Dick Ayers sounded just like you think he should: He's a very friendly and funny man who'd gotten his start way back, just after returning home from WW II, drawing Jimmy Durante for a comic book. Soon the young artist was drawing comics regularly and found himself helping to make comic book history, whether it be as part of the team that created a justice-loving cowpoke by the name of Ghost Rider for Magazine Enterprises, or doing stuff like inking Kirby on some mighty fine issues of Fantastic Four, *or even drawing up an incredible run of Sgt. Rock for the House of Ideas. And all that was before he did a literal ton more things of note. In fact, recently things seem to have kinda gone full circle for Ayers, as he's been creating some new adventures of the Haunted Horseman (A.K.A. Ghost Rider) for AC comics.*

He's happy to talk about all of that, and more; but tends not to center on his many past accomplishments. Understandably so, since he's been applying himself with some success to creating a herd of new tales, which will be appearing in both real and digital formats.

Ya see folks, the one and only Dick Ayers has staked out his own patch of the WWW. Truth be told, his new place over at ***www.AdventureStrips.com*** *seems just as comfy and fine a one as he's found in this here real one. The 'Strips is kinda like a virtual visit to your fondest memory of reading a great newspaper's Sunday comic strip. It's exhilarating, bright colored fun, and the perfect venue for Ayers' solid storytelling, fluid line work and gentle humor—Saturday afternoon showings of a fine tale which reveals the never-before told origin of the Haunted Horseman.*

So, first, I've taken a likin' to some of this here new fangled digital landscape. And I gotta tell ya, it ain't just the sunsets that are purty out here.

Second, whether you'd care to ride the digital range or roam the printed plains, it's a good, good time to be a fan of Dick Ayers—and western comics.

Comic Book Marketplace: The Haunted Horseman has a bit of a complicated history, and you were there right from the beginning, weren't you?

Dick Ayers: Oh yes, I was sitting in the room when the character was created. That's because I was doing Calico Kid. It was just a feature in *Tim Holt*, and we'd done about three or four issues. Then Vince Sullivan sat me down after I'd delivered an issue. We sat down with, I think, Ray Crane, who was the editor. So, it was the three of us there when Vince said, "Now, we're going to turn this guy into the Ghost Rider." Then he told me what the Ghost Rider was, more or less, and he told me how he'd gotten the idea from the Vaughn Monroe song, *Ghost Riders in the Sky*. So then, from there, I started designing the costume, and designing the character. And that's the creation of the Ghost Rider.

CBM: How much give and take on the story or the plot was there between you and Vince?

Ayers: As we went along, it became a collaboration. Stuff like where, in the first episode, Calico Kid and Sing Song get thrown into the whirlpool and then they see the ghosts of Calamity Jane and Wild Bill Hickok, that was my idea. That

Dick Ayers (left) with Ric Estrada at the 2002 San Diego Comic-Con.

came about in the first book, the first *Ghost Rider* issue.

CBM: Was there anything that had an influence on the design of the Ghost Rider's costume?

Ayers: Disney had "The Headless Horseman" story out there, [*The Legend of*] *Sleepy Hollow*, and Vince said, "Go see that, and get that kind of effect." So he didn't say copy it, but he wanted the Ghost Rider to have that kind of effect, that scary effect. So that was the closest thing to what we were looking for. And then, one day, Vin looked at me and said, "You know, I love the way you're drawing the Ghost Rider—long and thin." I didn't even give it a thought. That's just the way I drew him. But it turned out that it was a point he liked. It was more skeletal or eerie looking. Long and thin.

CBM: Did you work on the stories ahead of time with him, or did you just work your bits into the tales as the opportunity presented itself?

Ayers: No, they supplied scripts for stuff like that, when I got a good idea. But then I met this fellow, a friend of mine and a fellow artist. He was doing a mural down in Manhattan, and I went to see what he was doing. Boy, it was great. It was "The Last Supper," he was helping this famous artist; sorry, but I've forgotten what his name was. Anyway, while there I met this other fellow that wrote children's books. At the time, like all of us freelancers have had to do from time to time, he was selling pots and pans to bring in an income, because he was married. [General laughter]

So I said to him, "Well, gee whiz, why don't you write comics?" And he wouldn't think of it. He said, "No way, that's junk!" And I said, "Aw, come on, now. I'll take you down and you can meet the editor." "No," he said, "What I'll do is, I'll give you a sample of my work, and then you can take that in." So he gave me a couple of his stories that were printed in the pulp magazines, and they just happened to be westerns. And right away, Ray Crane, the editor, said, "We'll hire him!"

He became my steady writer. Whether it was *Ghost Rider*, and then *Bobby Benson's B-Bar-B Riders*, or whatever I did back then, I was teamed up with him. His name was Carl Menling. He passed on. We lost him. I guess he must have been around 50 years old at the time. It was a big loss, because the guy became so prolific at comic book writing. He had a system where he kept a file of every story synopsis that he'd ever sold, so he could do it over and over again.

CBM: Well, what was working with him like?

Ayers: I would be talking with Carl a lot on the phone. He and I would both feel ideas out. I would tell him, "I want Ghost Rider to speak in a Shakespearean effect," which only Carl got, I think, in those days. But it would be that type of stuff, and it would be over a telephone conversation.

CBM: The scripts themselves, were they done as full scripts or more like plot outlines?

Ayers: Oh, no. No. They were full scripts. You could say more like a movie script. Each panel told you exactly what the scene was, and then they gave you the dialogue, and the caption box. Say it's panel one, they would give you the description of the scene; then they would give you the caption, if there was one; and then they would give you the dialogue. And you had editors that would, when a writer wrote

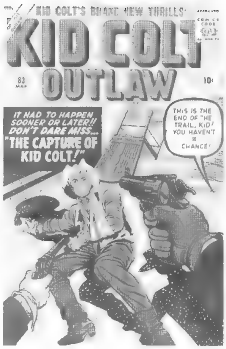
that there were 50 cavalry soldiers charging a dozen Indians, well, they'd count the damn figures when you brought the pages in! [General laughter] You had certain editors like that. "Where is this?" and, "Where is that?"

CBM: So you essentially stuck pretty close to what was in the script then.

Ayers: You interpreted exactly what they had written. But there's ways of doing it, you know. You can get the effect of a group while not drawing the individuals, one by one, or even the number of people in it. But you can get that effect.

CBM: What were some of the highlights while working on that initial run of *Ghost Rider*? Aside from having something that was steady.

Ayers: No, it wasn't [steady]. In fact, at that age, that was the only account I had. And I think it was Vin's secretary or gal Friday, Sally Henderson was her name, she told me something I've never forgotten. She said, "Dick, just don't have this one account. You've got to have *three* accounts to keep yourself busy, because there'll be dry periods where you won't have any work. But if you have three accounts, there'll be fewer of them." So that became my target all my life, to have three accounts—which I did have in the '50s. I had Charlton, and I had ME [Magazine Enterprises, which published *Ghost Rider*], and I had Timely, and that kept me busy enough to even have a fellow working with me.


KID COLT'S BRAND NEW THRILLS!
KID COLT OUTLAW
10¢
IT HAD TO HAPPEN SOONER OR LATER!! DON'T DARE MISS... "THE CAPTURE OF KID COLT!"
THIS IS THE END OF THE TRAIL, KID! YOU HAVEN'T A CHANCE!
Kid Colt Outlaw #83 (Mar 1959).

CBM: You did a lot of western work for Marvel, didn't you?

Ayers: Oh yes, because Stan Lee always kept me busy. Even though I was inking Kirby's work, I would get at least one story a month, a five-pager or something like that in a western book.

CBM: Did you have any particular western character over there that you were particularly fond of?

Ayers: I kind of liked the Two-Gun Kid, because he was a lawyer, and I patterned him after Abraham Lincoln, or at least the way he dressed. I have a room...we call the Lincoln Room, because it's got Lincoln memorabilia all over the walls—his signature and this and that—that I've collected over the years. He's somebody, in another field, that I admire. So, when I got the chance, I patterned Matt Hawk, the Two-Gun Kid, after Lincoln. That's why he's my favorite in that department, other than the Ghost Rider.

CBM: You also had quite a bit to do with the Jonah Hex character, too, didn't you?

Ayers: I did him quite a while over at DC, yeah.

CBM: Was that enjoyable for you?

Ayers: Oh yes. Because that had more like a realistic effect in the characterization. Michael Fleisher wrote it, and he wrote full scripts, too. After I left Marvel, I didn't want to go back to what they call "the Marvel method"—using a synopsis. I wanted the writer to supply me with the whole story. And that made the stories very good, I think, on Jonah Hex. Michael also wrote Scalphunter for a while, when I did that.

CBM: It's amazing how many of these western characters you've done over the years for all these different companies.

Ayers: I don't remember any features that had westerns. I know I did a hell of a lot of work at DC, like Unknown Soldier and all that. But I only mainly remember Scalphunter and Jonah Hex, because they really were monthly for quite some time.

CBM: Why didn't you want to continue working in the Marvel method?

Ayers: It worked good when it was with Stan. There was some kind of simpatico thing going there. I'd worked with Stan since 1951. He wrote all of my Wyatt Earp stories, and then those little short stories that he wrote all the time. But don't forget that, in the beginning, he too wrote his stories in the regular full script method. But as the books got more popular and more numerous, and because he was doing most of the writing himself, he had to find short cuts. First of all, I noticed I would get just the dialogue, and from what the dialogue was saying, I could gather what the scene was. I had no problems. And then he came up with the synopsis. The first one I had came on the Two-Gun Kid, a story called "The Bronc Buster" or something, where the guy's at a rodeo. It was a little short story. He said, "Here, try this," and he gave me a paragraph for a synopsis. Bingo, it worked great! One of my favorite stories. So I enjoyed it working with Stan. Sometimes on Sgt. Fury, well, a few times, why Stan would say, "Oh boy, I'm stuck this month. You think up the plot!" [General laughter] And I did. The first one I love to tell about is...

I went through the entire day worried once, because I had this thing, working with Stan, that a lot of times I would recognize that the story I was doing, more or less, came from something that I'd seen on TV. So then I'd start thinking all day long about all the Errol Flynn movies and all the war sto-

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ries. I tried it, and every one that I'd think up, it seemed to me that I'd done it. So, then I couldn't get any sleep, and Lindy, my wife, went, "Why don't you do one where this nun is trying to save these kids from behind the enemy lines, and the Howlers go in to bring them out?" "Oh," I said, "Stan will never go for that. That's got religion in it!" Remember, this is in 1960.

Still, that sounded good, so I got some sleep. The next morning I called Stan and told him about that idea, thinking he's going to write it. So he says, "Oh, that's great! Go ahead and do it." So we did it, and the story came out. [Laughter] It's a top favorite of mine because Stan wrote it, the words, and Frank Giacoia inked it, and I penciled it, and it came out beautifully!

So it would work like that. I did a story about a train that I took from a movie with Burt Lancaster. Stan ran that in two issues because he liked that one so much. And then there was another one I liked where each of the Howlers went on their own separate missions, and then reunited in the end to solve that story's main problem.

So it was a good team, when it was Stan with his Marvel method. I guess with the others that he had doing it with him, it was only about half a dozen of us at most, I guess, why we all kind of knew what he wanted, and also had the imagination to put it together. But later on, when other people were doing it, it didn't always work. Even when I look at the books today, I feel sorry for the writer, because I don't think many of the artists know how to tell stories with continuity. I think they are illustrators. You know, they came out of art school and don't know much about comics, because they don't know storytelling. So the writers end up with all of these pictures in front of them; how the hell do they put the words into the mouths of the characters?

The way I did it then, and do it now, it tells a story. I remember once, I took one story in to deliver the pencils to Sol Brodsky, the department head at the time, and when he looked at it he said, "My god, Dick, we don't need words with this, we can go straight to print without them!" And that's it—each picture leads into the next one. That's my continuity. And a good storyteller, that's what he does. He doesn't just throw pictures down to fill up a page.

CBM: You're coming back full circle, since you'll be telling the origin of the Haunted Horseman character in your www.AdventureStrips.com weeklies.

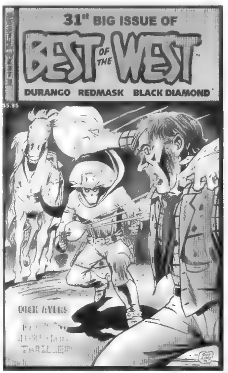
Ayers: Well, I've had luck in that department. Bill Black with his AC Comics, he's been reprinting the Ghost Rider strips, and all of the stuff that I did with Vince Sullivan. In fact he joked about it a few months ago, and said he was running out of them, he'd done them all. So I volunteered my services, and there's a new one coming out in the next issue, #31 of AC's *Best of the West*. But we have to use the name Haunted Horseman because Marvel has the copyright to the Ghost Rider title. They took that name, but they didn't take the story, which allowed Bill to keep the Haunted Horseman going, so he had a following again.

CBM: Well, how did this new strip end up on the web?

Ayers: That came through Bill Black, Chris Mills, the editor of 'Strips.com, had approached them because he wanted a western. Well, years ago I had put this story together as a graphic novel, and I'd submitted it to Bill. So he's had it all these years, and I suppose that he told Chris about this project he'd gotten in already. Anyway, that's how I started on the new stuff.

CBM: How do you like working on the web, as opposed to print?

Ayers: I love it, as far as my end of working on it, because it's working like a Sunday page. Instead of doing a 10 by 15 upright, I do it horizontal, like a Sunday page. Which is how you see it on the screen. I've got the six panels, they're always the same size, 5 by 5. And it's that way for a reason: anytime it comes about, why, it can be printed as a book with little trouble.



Best of the West #31 (2002).

CBM: It really does seem like this story is going to make a great read once it's all put together.

Ayers: As I tell the stories, I weave them together. Bart Lasher becomes a regular, the steady villain. He'll pop up a lot. Even though the Haunted Horseman might bury him under a pile of stones, he'll come back, like Milton Caniff would do.

CBM: Will we be seeing the Haunted Horsemen in new adventures?

Ayers: I hope so! I've got it lined up for 26 weeks, and if there's enough of a readership, it will continue. The current story you're reading goes on for 26 episodes. And I've got it figured out so that, after 26 episodes, that's when the sequence ends at that point and it goes on to another story. In other words, you're not left hanging.

CBM: And after that?

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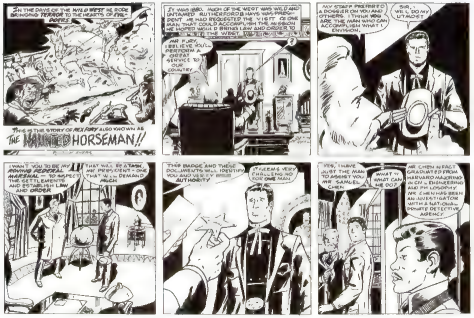
INTERVIEW

Ayers: Oh, after that I can keep on going, because there's the rest of the book that I wrote for the graphic novel.

CBM: What do you want folks to get from your work? I mean there's entertainment, obviously, but is there more that you hope to get across?

Ayers: Entertainment, yes. I'm not moralizing or anything. I like to tell a good story with a beginning, a climax, and an ending. I like that. You know, I like the story to end on page 23 or whatever it was. I'm not much for having it continued next month. My thought is, "Boy, the readers might not find it next month...or it might not be around where they can get it, and they'll feel cheated." [General laughter]


IN THE DAYS OF THE WILD WEST AS BOOK BRINGING TERROR TO THE HEARTS OF ALL!
THIS IS THE STORY OF REX FURY AND KNOWN AS THE HAUNTED HORSEMAN!!
IT WAS 1865... MUCH OF THE WEST WAS WILD AND LAWLESS. BUT HEROES DO ALWAYS HAVE WHO APPEAR... HE HAD REQUESTED THE VISIT TO ONE SPOT THAT COULD ACCOMPLISH THE ROBERTS' MURDER WORK OF BRINGING LAW AND ORDER!
I WANT YOU TO BE THE FIRST MARSHAL APPOINTED BY THE PRESIDENT TO THE TERRITORY OF NEVADA! THAT WILL BE A MAN WE TRUST AND RESPECT. THE PEOPLE WILL ACCEPT AND ESTABLISH LAW AND ORDER!
THIS BADGE AND THESE DOCUMENTS WILL IDENTIFY YOU AS THE LAW AND GIVE YOU AUTHORITY!
I'LL GIVE IT MY BEST SHOT, SIR!
OH, YES, I HAVE JUST THE MAN TO DO THE JOB, SIR! MY NEPHEW!
WHAT'S HIS NAME?
REX FURY!
HE'S NOT EXACTLY GRADUATED FROM HARVARD MAJORING IN LAW, BUSINESS OR ANYTHING ELSE!
HE CAME HIS BEST AN INVESTIGATOR FOR THE PINKERTON PRIVATE DETECTIVE AGENCY!

CBM: What do you get from doing this work?

Ayers: Enjoyment. Oh, I just love it. Especially westerns.

As an example: once, when Lindy was working in the kitchen, and I'd just finished a big splash page—this is when I worked in the Lincoln Room—I came running out, shouting "Look at this! Look at this, honey, it's great!" I'd just finished a drawing of a shootout in the middle of main street. You know, they're going to draw against each other. So Lindy says, "I've seen that a *hundred* times! For god's sake, it's the same one!" [General laughter] Then I realized that it was like that scene which is in all those westerns we've been talking about; the one where the big bad guy goes storming into the barroom and scaring everybody? [More laughter] I've done *that* one quite a number of times. It's the same scene, just with different big bullies coming in. But I get enjoyment out of it every time I do it.

You know, as far as westerners go, when I was in my teens, and before my teens, I lived in a little town in upstate New York with about 300 people. Back in the '30s, very few people had electricity. You had no running water. You just had the pump in the back yard, and the outhouse, and kerosene lamps, and everybody had a horse and a buggy. This is what I'm growing up with, in other words, what I'm drawing now. I remember there was even a period where we'd play cowboys and Indians, and sometimes we'd have the old plow horse, we'd be riding a real horse bareback. There was a point when I had a cap and ball gun when I was about 15. And in the schoolyard, we only had like a four room schoolhouse, and in the noontime us guys would practice the fast draw. Now, of course, the cap and ball gun I had had no [firing mechanism]. That had been filed off. So it was strictly just a toy. But it was a big, heavy gun itself that we were playing with.

THIS IS THE STORY OF REX FURY AND KNOWN AS THE HAUNTED HORSEMAN!!
I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE, MISTER, BUT I... AWWWRRK!
FROM NOW ON YOU'RE MINE!
NOW I'LL JUST GIVE YOU A TWENTY THOUSAND DOLLAR HEAD START... RUN, LAMB!
I SEEN 'EM RIDE SOUTH TOWARD GALLERY... RUSTLERS!
PROBABLY HEADING INTO THE BARROOM TO CELEBRATE! THOSE GUYS SURE LOVE BOOZE!
WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING BEFORE THEY BURN DOWN THE PLACE!
LOOK, SHERIFF, YOU'VE NEED A WHOLE POSSE TO PITCH THEM OUT! THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE THEY'RE LOOKING FOR TROUBLE!
I'M NOT AFRAID OF THEM! I'LL BE HEADING ON BACK TO TOWN!
AND SO DAN'L BREAKS OVER HIS KNEE AND...
HELLO, THERE! I'M THE NEW MARSHAL! I'M LOOKING FOR A MAN NAMED DAN'L BREAKS! THIS EARTH!
POLITE, FOR SUCH AN OUTLAW! WELL, NEPHEW, YOU'VE A MAJOR PROBLEM! THERE'S A MARSHAL CALLED REX FURY HERE LOOKING FOR YOU!
HEROIC, THAT'S WHAT I'M NOT! I'M A COWARD! I'M SCARED TO DEATH! I'M HORRIBLE IN A FIGHT! I'M NOT A HERO!
WHERE WERE THEY, MR. BORROWMAN (CONT'D.) EXCEPT I'M TOO EVERYTHING! WELL, GOOD SPY!
I KNOW A STRANGER WHO'VE GOT PLENTY OF REASON TO DIE!!
SHERIFF!

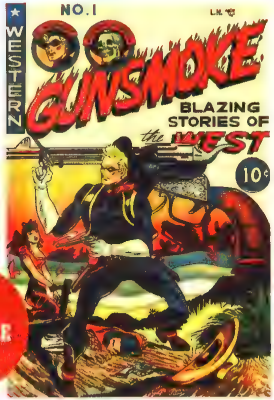
So there's a feeling that stays with me from those days. The town had false front buildings, just like I draw over and over and over in the westerns. I think all of this has given my westerns more the look of the northern Midwest, and not the adobe southwest, kind of feel. Anyway, all that's part of my sitting down and drawing a western. That's why, when I sit down, I just become western. I love it.

HAUNTED HORSEMAN © & ™ AC COMICS 2002

SMILE WHEN YOU SAY THAT, GHASTLY!

THE WESTERN COMICS ART OF GRAHAM INGELS

BY P. WARDLE



Long before Graham Ingels began using the pseudonym "Ghastly" on his masterfully-drawn horror classics for EC's *Haunt of Fear*, *Tales From the Crypt*, *Vault of Horror*, *Crime SuspenStories* and *Shock SuspenStories*, he was employed by several other publishers.

At Fiction House, Ingels drew the Sea Devil strip in *Rangers Comics* and the science-fiction/adventure feature Auro, Lord Of Jupiter in *Planet Comics*. This latter strip gave Ingels a chance to draw alien monsters and would show shades of his later work.

For Ned Pine's Comics Group, also known as Better Publications and Nedor, Ingels drew perhaps his best pre-EC covers. The classic eye-catchers he did for *Startling Comics* #35 and 36 and *Wonder Comics* #11 and 12 and occasional interior art are gems. Ingels was given an editorial position at Better where he redrew faces and cleaned up the work of less talented artists. Some of the other strips in *Startling* and *Wonder* have Ingels faces during this period. Reportedly, Ingels' alcoholism lost him his job, and he returned to freelancing. He did crime stories for D.S. and Magazine Enterprises, but found an early niche in western comics, a genre that was gaining popularity in the late 1940s. By the 1950s there would be dozens of western TV shows and [illegible] comic titles.

COVER © WESTERN COMICS, CONGRIL © WM. M. GAINES, AGENT, INC.

(above and right) A typical Ingels sf cover, **Startling** #44 (Mar 1947), and one with the airbrush look, **Startling** #46 (Jul 1947). More classic eye-catchers, **Wonder** #11 (Apr 1947) and **Wonder** #12 (Jun 1947).

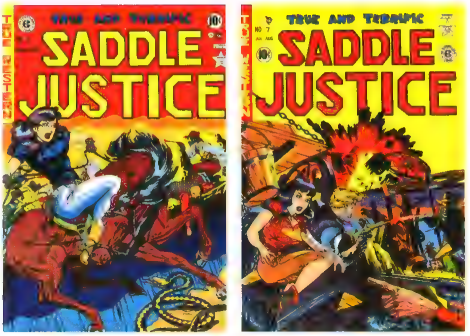
(previous page) **Gunsmoke** #1 (Apr/May 1949). Cowgirl detail from the cover of **Saddle Justice** #6 (Mar/Apr 1949).

The year 1948 saw Ingels published in four different western titles from three different companies. *Outlaws* #2 (May 1948), published by D.S. Publishing Co., contained an eight-page story drawn by Ingels. "Dallas Boone in Perilous Patrol" contains many of the themes that ran through most of the Ingels westerns to come. A great, action-packed splash page (in fact, the whole story nearly leaps off the page); a buxom blond cowgirl; and interesting shadow effects, particularly on page seven, where a lantern illuminates a dark cottage. The issue also contains Matt Baker art. Ingels art also appeared in two later issues of this title. An obscure company, D.S. actually had some good artists working for them, and their comics are as readable as most. I feel they probably died out because of bland logo and cover designs on most of their comics, and a lack of direction toward anything but the prevailing trend.

Ingels made his one and only foray into Hillman Periodicals in the Oct-Nov 1948 issue of *Western Fighters*. Issue 4 contained a beautifully drawn eight-page biography of Buffalo Bill by Ingels, plus another story with Bernie Krigstein art—the only time the two future EC artists would be in the same mag until 1954. Ingels' story abounds with well-drawn horses that feature his airy brush effects. These are also prevalent in his inking of wooden barrels. There's a goateed villain whose facial expression is a forerunner of the evil emissaries of the Witch's Cauldron stories to come.

Sketchy interior art on an early western job at EC, **Saddle Justice** #4 (Sum 1948).

STARTLING, WONDER COVER © NEDOR. SADDLE JUSTICE & PANELS © WM. M. GAINES, AGENT, INC.



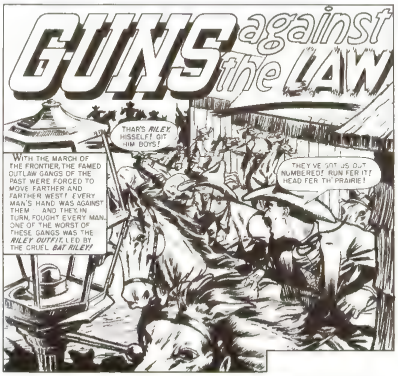
Multilayered action and beautiful women, **Saddle Justice** #6 (May/Jun 1949) and #7 (Jul/Aug 1949). These covers were scanned from the hardback EC Library volumes.

It was also in 1948 that Ingels joined EC. The horror comics would be a couple of years off yet, so he was given more westerns and some romance work. The first, cover-dated Summer 1948, was *Saddle Justice* #4. Ingels art would appear in every issue after that, including the issues called *Saddle Romances*. He would also appear in *Gunfighter* #5-14, occasionally doing two stories per issue. I won't bother to go through all the stories, just what I feel are the highlights of his western run.

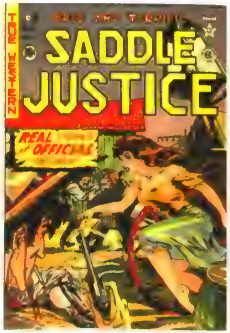
In an issue where Johnny Craig's beautiful work on "Colorado Rose" is likely to outshine both the Feldstein and Ingels contributions to most readers, "Guns Against The Law" in *Saddle Justice* #5 is a standout. Feldstein's work looks remarkably stiff beside the angular leaping and bounding of Ingels's characters. The horses rarely stay on the ground, and gunfights are exploding fire hazards with destruction all around. Just like his later horror work, Graham Ingels liked extreme intensity in his layouts and his inking solidified that approach.

Saddle Justice #6 featured a fabulous Ingels cover with a sexy cowgirl in tight pants on a bucking horse with a rattlesnake about to strike. The interior story by Ingels is competent but nothing special. The cover of #7 contains tons of fine brushwork on wagon wheels, a wooden bucket and the explosion in the background. The lighting effects are unique for a cover of this type too.

Saddle Justice #8 is the best of the run for Ingels fans. "Faro Kate" has a full page drawing of the lady gambler on the opening splash, depicted with a plunging neckline. People forget that as well as dripping zombies and evil madmen, Ingels could draw voluptuous women quite well. While his women don't excite like Matt Baker's, they have a mature sexuality that is lacking in a lot of the good girl art of that period. The cover of the issue employs a color wash (similar to watercolor) effect, often called airbrush, that only Ingels attempted. No modern printing house has ever been able to duplicate the effect that was possible then, when soft, pale "watercolors" could form the outlines of features entirely differently than a black line—half way between painted and line-drawn art. Both the presses and newsprint used then made possible a cover whose coloring has to be seen in the original comic to be believed. Ingels tried this technique on a couple of other EC pre-trend covers, and it is to Bill Gaines' credit that he allowed Ingels to experiment on something that could easily have caused printer complaints.


GUNS against the LAW
THAR'S RILEY HISSELF! GIT HIM BOYS!
WITH THE MARCH OF THE FRONTIER, THE FAMED OUTLAW GANGS OF THE PAST WERE FORCED TO MOVE FARTHER AND FARTHER WEST! EVERY MAN'S HAND WAS AGAINST THEM — AND THEY, IN TURN, FOUGHT EVERY MAN. ONE OF THE WORST OF THESE GANGS WAS THE RILEY OUTFIT, LED BY OLD MAN RILEY!!
THEY'VE GOT US OUT NUMBERED! RUN FER IT! HEAD FER TH' PRAIRIE!

A halftone of a splash panel from **Saddle Justice** #5 (Mar/Apr 1949); Ingels drew a few Western stories with a charcoal-like black pencil rather than inking conventional pencils.



Supreme examples of the watercolor-like airbrush effect Ingels often used, the artist would indicate the area for each airbrushed area and define its edge with a single red inked pen line, "red lines." **Saddle Justice** #8 (Sep/Oct 1949) and **Gunfighter** #12 (Nov/Dec 1949). These are covers of original comics.

The same technique was used, along with minimalist inking, on the next issue, now titled *Saddle Romances*. The heavily worded story Ingels drew inside, "Saddles In The Sky," still has many nice panels. "Cupid's Rodeo" in the following issue begins with some of the most beautiful Ingels artwork in any western. Sadly, he seems to lose interest in the second half, possibly because he was already moonlighting at Youthful Magazines, but more on that later. *Saddle Romances* #11's "Cheating Cowboy Lover" also suffers from the affliction of heavy word balloons and captions, but contains fine examples of Ingels' brushwork on the shadowy panels.

In *Gunfighter*, the first two issues had two Ingels stories each, and were more rushed and less attractive because of it. It wasn't until the fourth issue that Ingels appeared in (#8) that he contributed another fine cover, and an interior story worthy of his talents. "The Trouble In the Territory" is a ten-page story beginning with a dynamic splash page of a wagon chase. Ingels' superlative storytelling, expressive brushwork on Miss Nan's hair and the silhouetted bodies on pages four and six show the same brilliant technique as his later horror work.

Issue 9 features a woman's face in a panel without borders, a device Ingels used a lot for variety and particular effects that weren't common at that time. Ingels uses heavy brushwork for a speedy hairdo that impacts. The covers of issues 11 and 12 need to be mentioned; the first for its incredible depiction of a gun battle as the hero shoots at two owlhoots, whose wagon burns while a woman, her hair alight from the flames, takes refuge in his arms. The twelfth issue again uses the wash effect on the cover, and the nine-page interior story,

RO
TE
AMBLER
HERINE
THIS WOMAN WHO CAME OUT OF THE CALIFORNIA GOLD FIELDS ARMED WITH A HUNGER FOR NICE THINGS AND A POWERFUL BELIEF IN HER "LUCKY STREAK" WAS A STRANGE PERSON. HAD SHE

Detail of the "Faro Kate" splash, **Saddle Justice** #8 (Sep/Oct 1949).

More from **Saddle Justice** #5 (Mar/Apr 1949); a top tier of panels with layered motion, spotting of blacks and visual flow across panels.

ALL ART © WM. M. GAINES, AGENT, INC.

What isn't happening in this action packed cover? **Gunfighter** #11 (Sep/Oct 1949). Another scan from the hardback EC Library volumes.

SALLY, YUH LITTLE FOOL! DO YUH HAVE TO BELIEVE EVERYTHING YUH SEE? LISTEN, I-- THAT WOMAN DOESN'T MEAN-- THAT IS, I--
LIAR! LIAR! YOU LOVE HER! YOU CAN'T EVEN LIE WITHOUT CHOKING UP ABOUT IT!

The lush Ingels brushwork was in evidence before the EC New Trend; **Saddle Romances** #11 (Mar/Apr 1950).

"The Bandits of Eagle Rock," features a shaggy-bearded old man, reminiscent of a Berni Wrightson character from one of his 1970s fanzine stories. Ingels' influence on Wrightson wasn't just in witches and corpses. The same quality can be found in the mustached old man, Jeb Hall, in *Gunfighter* #13's "The Salivated Stetson."

During this time, Ingels still found time to do a number of covers and stories for *Gunsmoke*, a comic published by Youthful Magazines, which premiered with cover-date Apr/May 1949. Ingels did the covers for the first six issues, after which the extra work coming his way at EC (with higher pay) precluded his doing more, or indeed working for any other comics company until after EC converted to *MAD*-only publishing.

The first issue's cover is a fairly uncomfortable-looking heroic pose of the title character, Gunsmoke; but a large drawing of an old revolver across the page, the pretty girl in the background and the nearly psychedelic color scheme add an intriguing quality to the overall composition. Inside, Ingels drew two stories for a total of 16 pages. The first was the lead feature. The second one was more in line with what people expect from Ingels. It was a character called The Masked Marvel, a name better suited to a wrestler. He wore a green skull mask and was a frightening figure, though the plots never approached horror conventions. Neither feature was particularly well drawn, and Ingels surely had to rush to complete this along with his regular EC western and romance assignments; the Gunsmoke lead story looks like it was inked by another artist.

On the cover of *Gunsmoke* #2, the gun is back with different coloring. Gunsmoke's guns are blazing, a raven-haired saloon girl looks frightened at something off-screen (so to speak), a menacing shadow. On the wall behind her, a wanted poster of The Masked Marvel draws the eye momentarily. In the interior back-up story, he is wanted dead or alive. Ingels managed to convey the essence of both stories in one cover picture without captions or word balloons. Here both of the Ingels stories are better drawn, with fewer word balloons taking up space than in the first issue.

Gunsmoke #3 had the best cover drawing to that point (with yet another color scheme to the gun). This time, the busty woman is in the foreground, heavily influenced by the 1943 Howard Hughes-produced western film *The Outlaw*, which showcased more of Jane Russell's cleavage than anything else, and from then on, it was understood that women could have just as much importance to selling a western as horses, cattle and guns. Ingels' women seem to always resemble Russell for brunettes, while the redheads remind me of fiery Maureen O'Hara. Inside, the splash page of

[continued on page 42]

Somehow, some way, Tomahawk stayed in print for 25 years. From his first adventure in 1947 in *Star Spangled Stories* #69 (Jun 1947) to the end of his own title in 1972, there was always a Tomahawk story being told somewhere in the DC Universe. How did he do it? I'll tell you how. He never rocked the boat. He fought some Indians, chased some spies, and when the company decided that dinosaurs were the next hot thing, there was a dinosaur on the cover of his next issue!

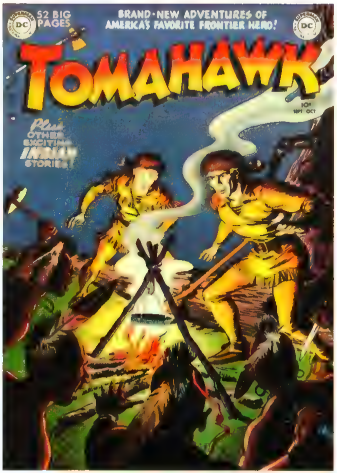
TOMAHAWK
Company Man

by Mark Squirek

In the strictest sense, his stories are westerns. However, the overall course of action throughout the book is more of a personal guerrilla war being conducted against the British Army. As a loner from the word go, Tomahawk lived out in the woods, away from town. Aside from his trusty sidekick, Dan Hunter, it was a long time before he aligned himself with any team. When he finally did decide to have a team, he didn't just join one; he formed one. They were called Tomahawk's Rangers. That was a big step towards socializing, but the loner was the guy in charge (sort of like Neil Young when he joins Crosby, Stills and Nash).

While there never seemed to be demand for Revolutionary War heroes in comics before his first appearance, the decision to place this western inside the 1770s is a nice change of pace from the general themes that usually dominate what we traditionally think of as westerns. It is the time period in which Tomahawk operates that differentiates him from everything else under the western umbrella.

Ok, maybe I am stretching it a bit here. Setting a western in someplace other than the actual West doesn't necessarily change the ingredients that make up a western. (See Akira Kurosawa's classic film *Seven Samurai* for clarification. Despite its Japanese setting, it was such a good western that it was later remade as a real western by Hollywood, *The Magnificent Seven*.)



ART & COVERS © DC COMICS

Tomahawk and Dan Hunter get their own title, **Tomahawk** #1 (Sep/Oct 1950).

Tomahawk has a horse and he eats dinner out under the stars a lot. There are plenty of fights with Indians as well as fights with the guys who are selling rifles to the Indians. Forts get attacked and every once in a while Tomahawk is hired to lead a wagon train through Indian territory. He has an incredible knowledge of all things Indian and not only speaks their many languages, but also knows how to read the tiniest detail from a trail. For a loner, he is incredibly well connected, as he has friends in the strangest places, from houses of politics to Indian reservations (check out the guests at his "Wedding"). True, there is some espionage going on (Redcoat spies!), and the action takes place in and around the War for Freedom, but it sure sounds like a western to me.

Much of the credit for what separates Tomahawk from the rest of the westerns goes to the writer, and Revolutionary War buff, Fred Ray. He came aboard early on and had the longest run on the title. He is the writer who is most closely tied with the title's development. Over the course of much of the series' life, Ray took his love of the time period and infused the stories with a touch of authenticity that helped place the character slightly outside the regular western themes. However, while Ray spent years with Tomahawk, he was not the first one to write the title.

Fred Samachson had that distinction. He had a long history of writing for comics and seemed to be comfortable going where the work needed him. By the time of Tomahawk's creation in 1947, Fred had already worked on Sandman, Congo Bill, Green Arrow and a long run of the Seven Soldiers of Victory over in *Leading Comics*. Very early on, he had worked on stories for DC's two big guns, Superman and Batman. Throughout the fifties he also wrote for *Strange Adventures* and *Mystery in Space*. When he wrote the first Tomahawk, his most famous contribution to comic's history was still about seven years away. With the help of Mort Weisinger, he scripted the very first appearance of Jonn Jonzz, Manhunter from Mars in *Detective* #244 (Nov 1955).

Tomahawk takes over the cover from Robin (and stays there until #121), **Star Spangled Comics** #96 (Sep 1949).

In battle against the British and their Native American allies, **Star Spangled Comics** #116 (Oct 1951).

Samachson also wrote a good deal of science fiction under the pen name of "William Morrison." In 1950 and in 1953 his writing was selected for inclusion in the annual publication *Isaac Asimov Presents the Greatest Science Fiction Stories*. This was a compilation of the best stories of the year. Among those also published in that volume those two years were Theodore Sturgeon, Arthur C. Clarke and Phillip K. Dick. Not bad company!

The responsibility for the artwork fell to longtime comic artist Edmond Good. Prior to Tomahawk, he had worked at Quality and also at Fox. He was the first to draw the buckskin-clad hero as he fought for America's independence. When Tomahawk moved into his own title, Fred Ray did as much as possible with the title.

One of several monthly anthologies being published at the time, *Star Spangled Stories* was also the home to backup features like Captain Compass and Penniless Palmer. To draw readers in, the magazine would feature a superhero on the cover (in this case, Robin). The title itself was originally home to the Star Spangled Kid and His Pal, Stripsey. Over the years, the magazine had also hosted stories about the Newsboy Legion, TNT and Dan the Dyna-

Mite, and Robotman. Tomahawk's run as a backup story was strong, but did not set the world on fire. However, as the demand for superheroes was beginning to die out in the late '40s and early '50s, he was in the right magazine at the right time. With issue 96, Tomahawk took over the cover to *Star Spangled Stories* and was on every cover until #121, where he lost it to a brand new hero, Ghost Breaker. Ten issues later, the magazine changed its title to *Star Spangled War Stories* and all other backups were dropped.

Throughout his run in *Star Spangled*, Tomahawk was also periodically appearing as a backup over in *World's Finest*. This started in 1948 and after a few years of off again and on again appearances, he became a regular from 1953 until 1959.

In addition to his early appearances in *World's Finest*, Tomahawk must have impressed someone, because in 1950 he got his own title. There are many reasons for this. First and foremost, even without an easily identifiable artist, the stories, thanks to Fred Ray, had a strong sense of continuity as well as interesting variations on the normal western stories. They also were good on characterization and the distinctiveness of the Revolutionary War setting placed them apart from most of the westerns of the day. In addition, super-hero books were on the wane and, for a multitude of reasons, westerns were rising in popularity (the biggest reason was the advent of television, which may not have been everywhere yet in 1950, but it was there).

Also, publishers began to see that the market was changing. Comics themselves were moving away from anthology-type books. Since Tomahawk was a proven, hard-working property that already had a built-in following from runs in two other magazines, there was no reason to think that he couldn't support his own title. In addition, it was a time when comics were really beginning to split into specific genres. From celebrities to funny animals to romance, superheroes were being systematically replaced across the board. The move away from anthology-type issues was hastened by the publisher's new ability, through research and sales statistics, to get much more specific information on what the public liked. Also, with sales declining, editors were much quicker to jump on trends, hoping to capitalize on them and attract new readers.

Not many Westerns can claim to have regular adventures in New York! **Star Spangled Comics** #121 (Oct 1951).

DINOSAUR! **Tomahawk** #58 (Sep/Oct 1958).

Tomahawk was not the only backup character getting his own title around this time. A year before Tomahawk's debut, Superboy had jumped ship from another anthology (*More Fun Comics*). His #1 debuted in 1949. A few years later, in 1954, another former backup character, Congo Bill, received his own book.

So now it is the fifties, and this is where Tomahawk earns his title as a Company Man. Simply put, if there was a trend, no matter what it was, it generally appeared in Tomahawk.

Here is a great example. It's 1955 and Davy Crockett is everywhere. This is one of the first nationwide crazes created by television. What's really important about this craze is that it affects the youth, specifically the male youth that reads comics. So, in issue 35, dated September, 1955, Tomahawk meets a young Davy Crockett in a cover story called "The White Buffalo." The following issue makes the connection explicit as the title says it all, "The Return of Young Davy Crockett."

Now, it is 1955, you are nine years old and in the drugstore

ART & COVERS © DC COMICS

wearing a coonskin cap. What title are you going to grab first off of the spinner rack?

This following of trends goes on for the rest of the decade and into the sixties. Over the course of time, dinosaurs somehow jump out of their time element and visit the 1770s. The influence of other mediums on the magazine is so pervasive that, during a brief mid-sixties rise in the popularity of monsters, Frankenstein actually puts in an appearance. He shows up on the Go-Go Checked cover of issue 103 and the story that follows is mentioned as a possible inspiration for Mary Shelly's famous book.

Tomahawk fought what showed up, few questioned it, and his magazine continued to sell.

The inevitable question is: "Was there a Gorilla Cover?"

The answer is: "*Yes, this is DC!*"

Okay, not only is there a fantastic gorilla cover (#86), but there was also a great monkey cover and it was a great monkey story.

The monkey was in issue 69 (Mar/Apr 1959) and tells the story of "The Fabulous Frontier Chimp." It seems that Tomahawk and Dan have been escorting a circus through the wilds. Unfortunately, the circus' prize chimp escapes and makes haste for the wilderness. After they find him, they dress him in miniature buckskin to keep him warm. Later on in the story, Chigger, the chimp, not only manages to free a captured Tomahawk, but he fends off the attacking braves as well!

When super-heroes were on the rebound in the early sixties, Tomahawk gets a new character in issue 81. Nurse Bess Lynn becomes a costumed Miss Liberty and appears off and on until the end of the run in 1972.

The Revolutionary War gets its first costumed hero, Miss Liberty; **Tomahawk** #81 (Jul/Aug 1962).

GORILLA! **Tomahawk** #86 (May/Jun 1963).

Team books are starting to take off and two issues later, we see the creation of Tomahawk's Rangers (when they appeared on the cover, they were referred to as the "Rip Roarin' Rangers"). Comprising 15 or so rotating members, they also help Tomahawk through most of the rest of his run. They parted ways in issue 134, shortly after Tomahawk's son had taken over the title.

Their longevity may have been helped by their colorful nicknames: Big Anvil (who was actually the "Frontier Frankenstein" in the earlier mentioned #103), Cannonball, Brass Buttons, Stovepipe, Long Rifle, Healer Randolph and Frenchie were among those who fought under Tomahawk's command. One of the lesser-remembered troops of heroes in the DC canon, they did have their share of casualties. Matt Wills shows up in issue 116, only to die at the end. Another member, Horseshoe, met an early fate as well in issue 128.

There was also a continuing villain in Tomahawk's cast of characters. British spy Lord Gerald Shilling made his first appearance in issue 28. He showed up almost a dozen times over the next ten years. He last appeared in issue 86, but Tomahawk found Lady Shilling (AKA "The Hood") ten issues later. (She only appeared once after that, in issues 110 and 111.)

As with most things that follow trends, eventually the trends pass you by. By the time of the early seventies, super-heroes were again dropping off and some thought the western was poised for a comeback. For the final issues of the book's run, it shifted emphasis to Tomahawk's son. With issue 131, the book was re-named *Son of Tomahawk* and the time period that most of the

action took place in moved up about thirty years to the beginning of the 19th century. The last issue published was #140 and it was dated May/Jun, 1972.

Tomahawk doesn't show up again for quite awhile after his book's cancellation. It isn't until 1989, in *Swamp Thing*, that we see him in a significant role again. The eight-issue mini-series *Time Masters* quickly followed that appearance. Each of these titles takes a chance on history and the additions to the canon of Tomahawk that each story makes are an enjoyable read in this post-crisis era. Both titles gave a cover to Tomahawk (*Swamp Thing* #89 and *Time Masters* #4), and he really deserved the recognition.

Solid, dependable sellers like Tomahawk really do deserve to be remembered. Interesting and good looking covers, solid storytelling and a definite desire to appeal to the comic book reader of the day, these are the very qualities that enabled the title to stay around for so long. Every month, he showed up on the newsstands or in the drugstores and he got the job done (more specifically, Fred Ray got the job done).

The title was a great place for many to hone their skills and to also create some memorable images. Early on, Frank Frazetta spent some time working on the book. Near the end, Neal Adams did multiple covers for the title. Nick Cardy turned in some beautiful pencils. Frank Thorne also did some work on the book at the very end. Stealing a note from the old anthologies, issues 131 through 134 had a great backup feature by Joe Kubert called "Firehair."

You really can't say anything bad about Tomahawk. Sure, the stories were occasionally goofy and the plots occasionally went off into a ditch sometimes, but, hey, he held his job, through thick and trend, for 25 years. That's a heck of a lot longer than I have ever been with any one employer. There is something to be admired about a good—*Company Man*.

Tomahawk predated Mary Shelley (and Jack Pierce)! **Tomahawk** #103 (Mar/Apr 1966).

COVER © DC COMICS

GRAHAM INGELS' WESTERN ART

[continued from page 37]

"Song Of Six Guns" is Ingels art but the rest of the story is amateurish and contains none of the Ingels pizzazz, the layouts and inking obviously by someone else. In The Masked Marvel story, only the woman in the splash page appears to be done by Ingels. Following this, Ingels worked exclusively for EC for at least the next five years, and aside from three more *Gunsmoke* covers, did no more work for Youthful Magazines.

Many Ingels horror fans may be disappointed at his art in these comics. Having seen just about every comic story Ingels drew, there's no doubt that, though he dabbled in other genres, artistically, nothing comes close to his classic EC horror stories. He never had quite the affinity for drawing westerns that, say, Russ Heath or Doug Wildey did. Still, love them or hate them, his western art never looked quite like anyone else's and it never failed to make an impact.

A portrait in a borderless panel from **Gunfighter** #9 (May/Jun 1949); a whiskered oldtimer from **Gunfighter** #12 (Nov/Dec 1949); and Gunfighter himself (wearing recently salivated Stetson) from **Gunfighter** #13 (Jan/Feb 1950).

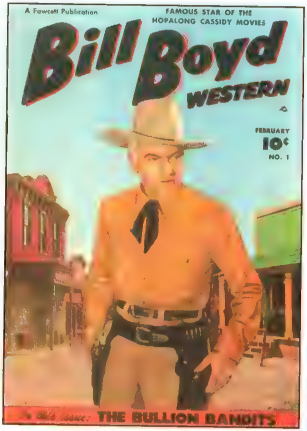
A REAL SKELETON. I'VE SEEN IT! IT RIDES ON A BIG WHITE HORSE. AFTER IT RIDES, SOMETHING DREADFUL ALWAYS HAPPENS TO THE LITTLE RANCHERS! IT'S A SYMBOL OF OUR DEFEAT!

ART © WM. M GAINES, AGENT, INC

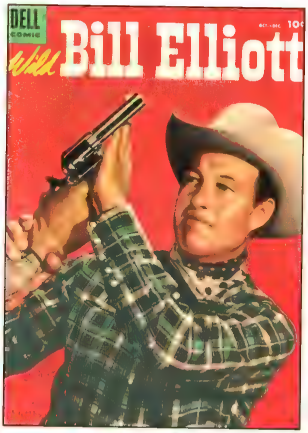
Little Beaver, Red's cowboy pal, by **Fred Harman,**

(clockwise) Cover to **Red Ryder Comics** #91 (Feb 1951) which, in its coloration, shows Harman's already veering off into a painterly mode. Harman and his wife and Little Beaver, perhaps the most popular of the strip's characters. A copy of one of Harman's paintings from the dust jacket of a book collection of them.

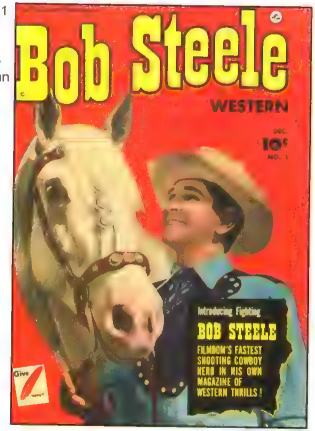
COWBOY GALLERY



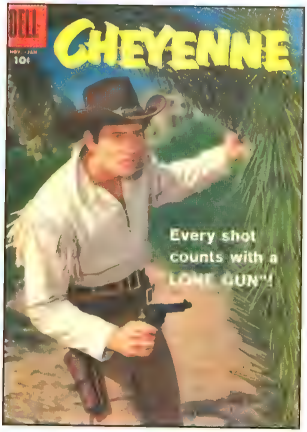
Bill Boyd #1 (Feb 1950)



Wild Bill Elliott #15 (Oct/Dec 1954)

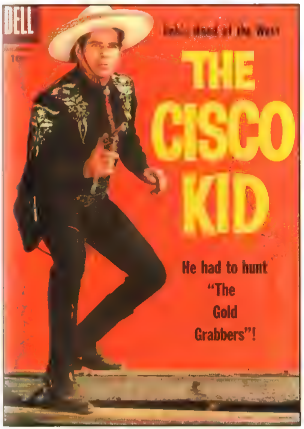


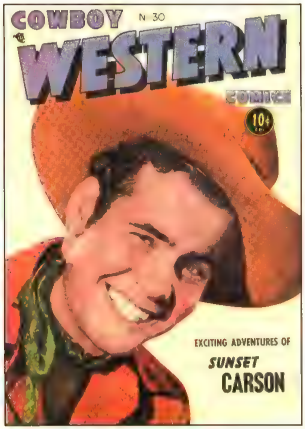
Bob Steele #1 (Dec 1950)



Cheyenne #5 (Nov 1957/Jan 1958)

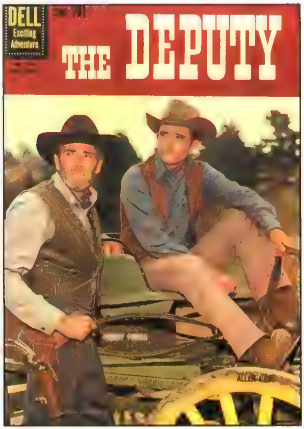
COWBOY GALLERY





Cisco Kid #38 (Jan/Mar 1958)

Cowboy Western #30, Sunset Carson, (Dec 1950)

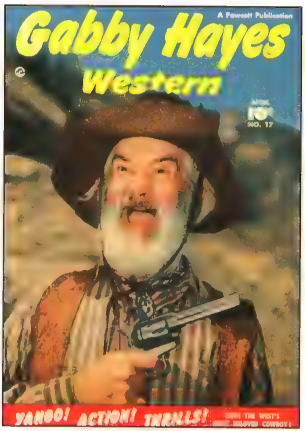


Dale Evans #13 (Sep/Oct 1950)

The Deputy, FC #1130 (Sep/Nov 1960)

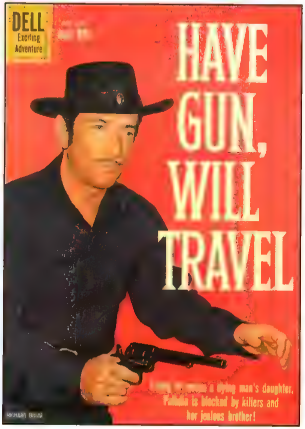
COWBOY GALLERY

El Dorado, Movie Classic 12-240-710 (Oct 1967)



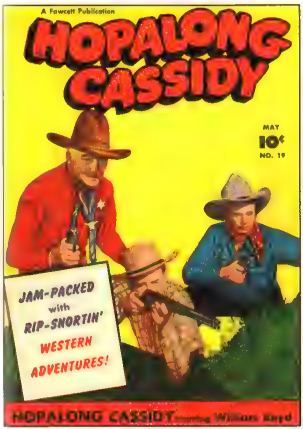
Gabby Hayes Western Vol 3 #17 (Apr 1950)

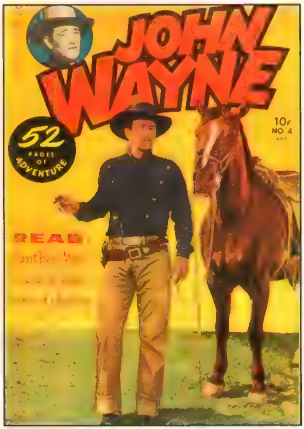
Gene Autry #64 (Jun 1952)



Have Gun, Will Travel #7 (Oct/Dec 1960)

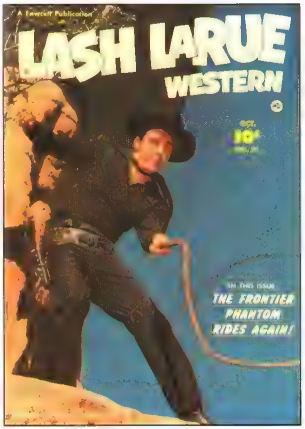
COWBOY GALLERY

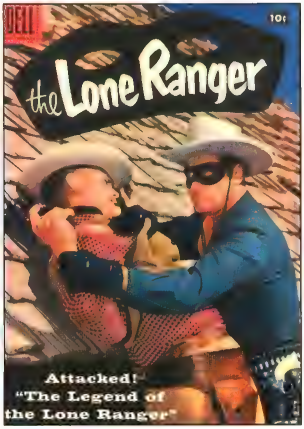




Hopalong Cassidy Vol 4 #19 May 1948)

John Wayne #4 (Aug 1950)

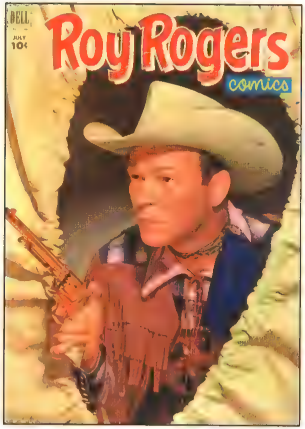




Lash Larue Vol 4 #21 (Oct 1951)

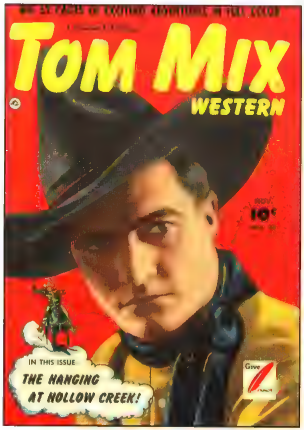
The Lone Ranger #113 (Nov 1957)

COWBOY GALLERY

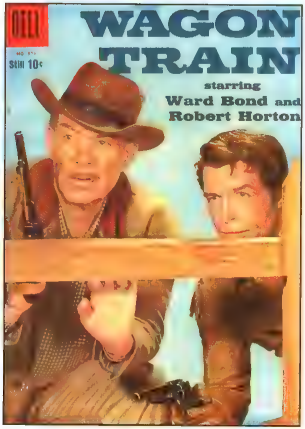


Roy Rogers #55 (Jul 1952)

Tex Ritter #1 (Oct 1950)



Tom Mix Vol 6 #35 (Nov 1950)



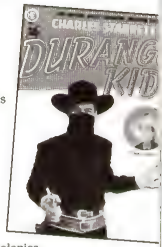
Wagon Train, FC #971 (1958)

FRANK FRAZETTA

WHITE INDIAN/WHITE WOLF

by S. C. Ringgenberg

The White Indian strip ran under the title "Dan Brand and Tipi" when it was the backup feature in *The Durango Kid* comic book. The first 16 installments varied in length between six and eight pages and featured art by the peerless Frank Frazetta. Dan Brand was a sort of frontier Tarzan who had been adopted by Indians in Revolutionary War-era America. After Frazetta's departure for greener pastures, other hands took over the art chores on Dan Brand, including the excellent Sid Check and Angelo Torres. Torres has always identified Frazetta as one of his primary influences in comics, and both he and Check collaborated with Frazetta on some early comic book pages and covers.



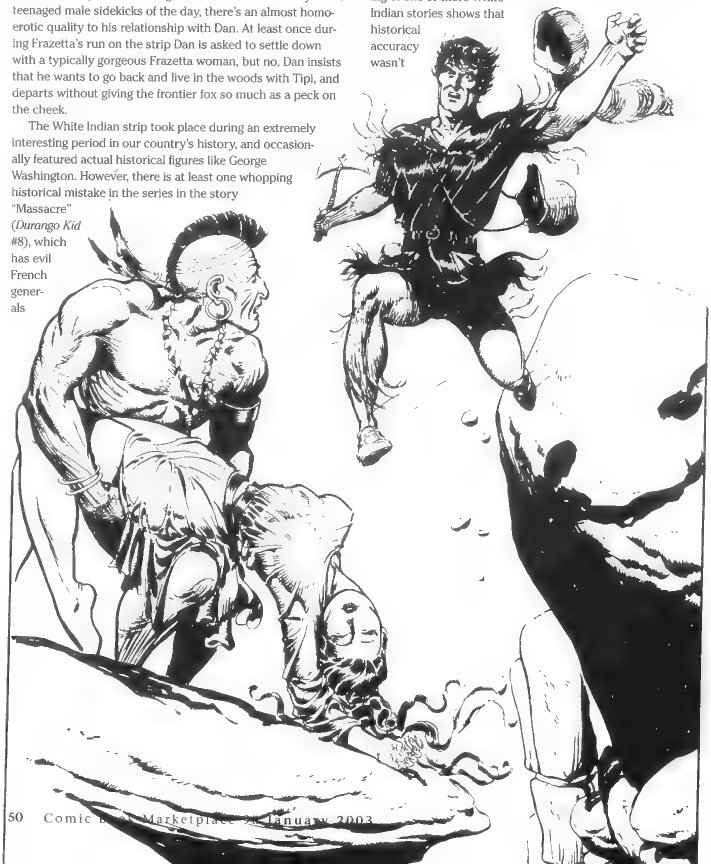
Since this issue of *CBM* focuses on westerns, the White Indian strip deserves consideration here, even though technically it's more of an "Eastern" than a "Western," taking place as it does among the 13 original colonies during the late 1700s. However, geographical quibbling aside, it can also be included here by virtue of its content; for it has all the elements of traditional westerns: Indian attacks, gun battles (albeit with flintlocks instead of six-shooters and Winchesters), chases on horseback and mano-a-mano duels between Dan Brand and a horde of loathsome baddies that ran the gamut from cruel and haughty British officers, treacherous Tory spies, scheming Indian medicine men and slimy pirates to brutish frontier renegades.

Dan Brand and Tipi
MAN AND ANIMAL LIVED THE LAW OF THE WILD ALONG THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL... IT WAS "KILL OR BE KILLED" IN THE FOREST PRIMEVAL! BUT DAN BRAND AND TIPI CHANGED SOME OF THAT WHEN THEY CROSSED THE TRAIL OF
"THE WHITE WOLF"

Tipi, Dan's teenaged Indian sidekick, wasn't bad as teenage sidekicks go. He was loyal and

courageous, and more than once saved Dan's bacon when a back-shooting bad guy imperiled the heroic frontiersman's life. In addition to these sterling qualities, Tipi served the age-old sidekick function of giving Dan Brand someone with whom to discuss plot details and further the story so he wouldn't always be muttering to himself. And like many of the teenaged male sidekicks of the day, there's an almost homo-erotic quality to his relationship with Dan. At least once during Frazetta's run on the strip Dan is asked to settle down with a typically gorgeous Frazetta woman, but no, Dan insists that he wants to go back and live in the woods with Tipi, and departs without giving the frontier fox so much as a peck on the cheek.

The White Indian strip took place during an extremely interesting period in our country's history, and occasionally featured actual historical figures like George Washington. However, there is at least one whopping historical mistake in the series in the story "Massacre" (*Durango Kid* #8), which has evil French generals stirring up the Iroquois and the Huron warriors to attack the white settlers. This story ignores the fact that the French and Indian War ended in 1763. Seven years *before* the first White Indian story starts in 1770. The rest of the continuity takes place during the Revolutionary War. But even a cursory reading of one or more White Indian stories shows that historical accuracy wasn't

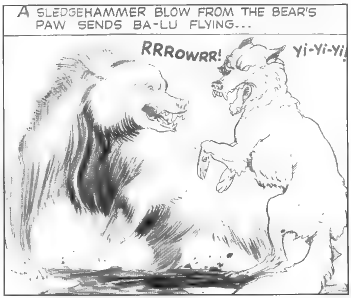


a priority on the strip; it always took second place to the kind of slam-bang action Frank Frazetta has become famous for.

The art on the White Indian strips was strong from the beginning, with Frazetta showing continual improvement with every strip he drew. The final installments contain some of the most beautiful early comic book pages (1949-1951) Frazetta drew. Handling both penciling and inking chores, Frazetta's art displayed the results of the early art training, hard work and natural talent that made him one of the best American comic book artists ever. Obviously highly influenced by Hal Foster's work on *Tarzan*, Frazetta's Dan Brand could almost be the younger brother of Foster's handsome jungle lord. White Indian is also interesting to Frazetta scholars as one of the very few continuing characters he ever drew. Except for the two years he drew the daily strip *Johnny Comet*, or the nine years when Frazetta ghosted the Sunday and daily *Li'l Abner*, he never did as many pages (over 100) of any character as he did with Dan Brand.

Frazetta's backgrounds of the Colonial American wilderness are particularly lush and detailed throughout the strip. His forest background for the story "Sleep of Death" (*Durango Kid* #10) is particularly lush and well rendered. At this point Frazetta was already working in the gnarled trees and mossy rocks that would eventually enter his repertoire as a fantasy painter. When the scripts allowed him room, Frazetta really went to town depicting the giant trees, wide rivers, sheer cliffs and massive rock formations of the frontier landscape.

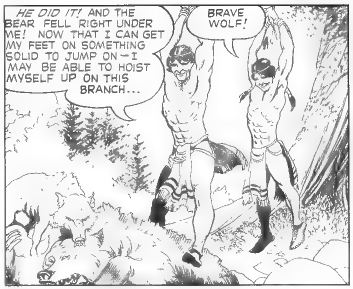
Having grown up in an era when westerns were omnipresent in popular culture, Frazetta wound up drawing his share of them—for Toby, National, Magazine Enterprises, even a shock story set on a modern, 1950s-era ranch for EC, done with Al Williamson ("Fired" in *Crime SuspenStories* #17). As a painter, Frazetta didn't venture into



the western idiom very often, though he certainly could have. The few western paintings he has done, a mere handful of book covers and advertising illustrations, have all been excellent. But White Indian is one of his finest early accomplishments in the western genre.

With that said, "The White Wolf" is, without doubt, Frazetta's masterpiece from this fine early series. The art is Frazetta at his most rambunctious. He lovingly renders "Ba-Lu" the eponymous albino wolf in 27 of the story's 39 panels. And in almost every panel, the white wolf is the most visually exciting element present. By contrast, Dan Brand and Tipi, the strip's ostensible stars, are shown in only 24 panels, and Si Bannis, the strip's brutish, unmemorable villain, is seen in only eight panels. The subplot of Bannis scheming to ambush Dan Brand and Tipi is obviously secondary to the story of their befriending of the great white wolf, the story's real star. It's an unusual entry in the series, which, to be honest, had rather formulaic scripting. In fact, I suspect the White Indian strip would only be remembered today by hardcore western buffs if it weren't for Frazetta's bold art. The first sixteen issues of *Durango Kid* containing Frazetta White Indian strips are the most valuable and sought-after comics in the title's run. Artwise, the Durango Kid stories that lead off each issue are pretty blah by comparison. The White Indian strip was discontinued after issue 17, though the *Durango Kid* title lasted until issue #41 (1955). Interestingly enough, there were five White Indian anthologies (#s11-15) issued. An even dozen Frazetta stories are featured in #11-13. The White Indian stories from *Durango Kid* #s 6, 8, 14, and 15 were never reprinted in a *White Indian* comic. The other two issues of the *White Indian* title featured Dan Brand stories that never appeared in the *Durango Kid* comic. *White Indian* #15 is of special interest to Fleagles fans, for it boasts the aforementioned Frazetta-esque art by Sid Check and Angelo Torres that was misidentified years ago as Frazetta art and has been continually misidentified in subsequent Frazetta checklists. For the record, Sid Check and Angelo Torres, not Frank Frazetta, drew the story, titled simply "White Indian," that appears in *White Indian* #15.

Frazetta was well suited to the Dan Brand stories. His lush, larger than life backgrounds and vivid action sequences imbued the stories with an outsized grandeur the scripts certainly didn't generate. The first White Indian story (*Durango Kid #1*) shows Frazetta's powerful style in the process of evolving. It's vigorous and fun to look at, but it still shows traces of his earlier influence by Caniff. His characterizations are still somewhat cartoonish. As the series progressed, Frazetta's figures got more realistic and his inking became more Foster-esque. It's fair to say that the art on all of Frazetta's Dan Brand and Tipi strips was at least somewhat reminiscent of Foster's tenure on *Tarzan* (1929-1937). But this bimonthly backup strip, with stories that varied from six to eight pages an issue, was a good opportunity for Frazetta to flex his muscles and grow artistically.


HE DID IT! AND THE BEAR FELL RIGHT UNDER ME! NOW THAT I CAN GET MY FEET ON SOMETHING SOLID TO JUMP ON — I MAY BE ABLE TO HOIST MYSELF UP ON THIS BRANCH...
BRAVE WOLF!

Frazetta's anatomy and panel compositions grow steadily more assured right up until the last one he drew. Frazetta may never have been a storyteller on par with Eisner or Kurtzman, but his draftsmanship and powerful figures always had the ability to draw you in even when the scripts were less than enthralling.

White Indian wasn't especially violent as comic strips go, but there were a few moments when it lived up to the violence-soaked reputation of pre-Code comics, such as the scene at the end of "Tory Treachery" (*Durango Kid* #9). A brief four-panel sword duel ends with Dan shoving his blade a good three or four inches into D'Arcy, his Tory antagonist. Blood gushes freely from D'Arcy's open mouth. The next panel shows Dan brandishing the bloody sword blade. Aside from the explicit violence on page seven, "Treachery" also features some nice background landscapes in the first four panels on page two. Panel five contains an image that was used as the cover of *White Indian* #13, though Frazetta didn't draw it. The editors at Magazine Enterprises missed a good bet not using the young Frazetta for *White Indian* covers. His covers for some of Magazine Enterprises' other western titles (*Ghost Rider* and *Straight Arrow*) from around the same period show what he was capable of, and they are impressive.

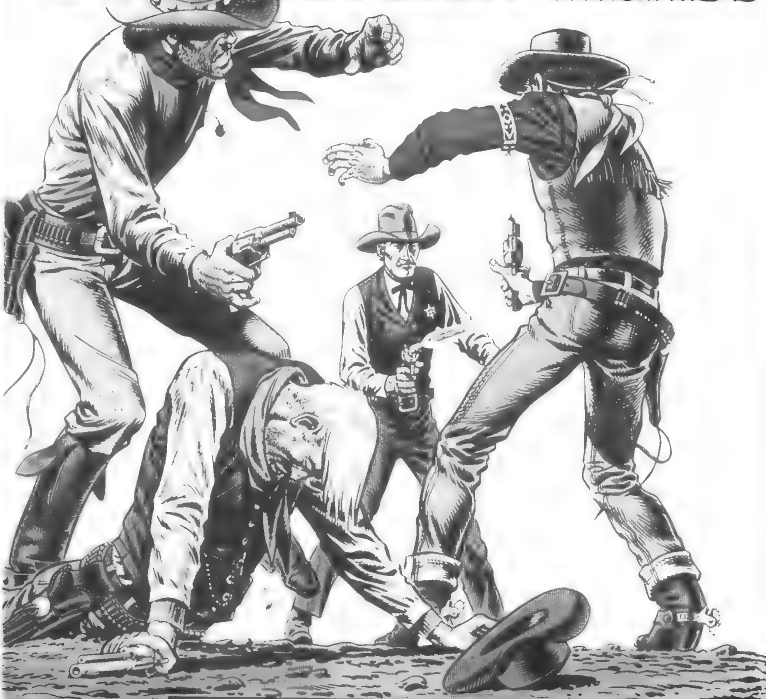
The frenetic splash panel of "Massacre" left no doubt that Frazetta had become a master of comic book action. The battle scenes in this story are great and Frazetta peoples it with a cast of hundreds of Indians, settlers and British troops. Every page of this seven-page gem pulses with life and action. The backgrounds are particularly nice in this story, too. Frazetta throws in panels showing lush meadows or thick forests of gnarled, vine-draped trees in an economical, but effective manner, giving just enough detail to create an environment. British Colonel George Washington makes a cameo, as does British General Braddock, another real-life historical figure.

"Underworld of the Wilderness" is the last new White Indian story Frazetta drew and it would be great to say that it, too, was an artistic leap forward. Unfortunately, it's not nearly as artistically satisfying as "The White Wolf." Don't get me wrong, it's a good story, but Frazetta seems less inspired by the plot of frontier brigands trying to rob Dan and Tipi of a chest of money destined for the Colonial Army. There are some good action scenes, and the bad guys are pretty rough on Dan and Tipi, tying them up near the story's climax, and earlier leaving them strung up by their thumbs to die in a fierce rainstorm. However, Frazetta's art here seems more rushed, and not on the same level as "The White Wolf." Perhaps the shorter six-page length of "Wolf" enabled Frazetta to really excel instead of just rushing to meet a deadline. (Frazetta was notorious for putting things off to the last minute and then banging out a masterpiece.) As evidence of this, check out panel five from page five for the magnificently rendered headshot of the white wolf. Frazetta follows this up with a lithe, wonderfully alive full-length view of the wolf slinking ahead of Dan and Tipi. The wolf's prominence in the splash panel and in the story's last panel leave no doubt that the white wolf is this story's star.

Despite his usual deft touch with animals, Frazetta barely draws the coach horses at the beginning of "Underworld," and his forest backgrounds are more minimal than usual. The fight scene on the last page plays out against mostly empty backgrounds. Perhaps by then, Frazetta was just burned out on the characters. This is one of his longest early projects and he was presumably ready for other challenges. According to colleagues like Harvey Kurtzman, in the early '50s Frazetta was always as busy as he wanted to be, and was picky about who he worked for.

Yet despite thin characters and predictable plots, Frazetta's bold art made Dan Brand the White Indian memorable for a brief time. Fortunately for Frazetta fans, almost all of the Dan Brand stories have been reprinted, either in the *White Indian* title, or in one of innumerable fanzine reprints that started in the mid-'60s and have continued into the present. However, this is one western series that deserves to be collected, with the art reproduced from originals, or whatever are the best copies available. It's an early gem by a man who would go on to be one of the best artists in comics despite a relatively small body of published work.

JOHN SEVERIN HEADS



by S.C. Ringgenberg

'Em Off at the Pass

It's such a cliché to call the old-timers in the comics business legends. Yet, in John Severin's case, it's almost unavoidable. Born in 1921, Severin began working in the comics business in 1947. Amazingly, after 55 years in the business, Severin's art is still as much in demand as ever, and more power to him. Anyone who's ever seen a page of Severin's detailed, beautifully rendered, historically accurate western, war and adventure stories must acknowledge that this guy is still one of the grand masters of his chosen medium at an age when the majority of his peers are either deceased or long since retired.

Although Severin has done few super-hero comics during his long career, with the exception of a long stint inking The Incredible Hulk *over Herb Trimpe's pencils, he has always managed to find markets for his wacky* Mad*-style humorous work, and realistic war, western and historical adventures. Severin's work has long been prized by history buffs and war fans for these very qualities. Although all of his images are filtered through the prism of Severin's distinctive style, he is such a devotee of realism that you can bet your boots that every revolver, saddle or frontier storefront he draws will be based on careful research to be as accurate as possible. However, this is not to say that Severin is incapable of making something up when it suits the story.*

John P. Severin is probably best know to comics fans for his work at EC, Atlas and Prize Comics in the 1950s, his work at Cracked *from 1958 until the late 1990s, and for a vast body of interior pages and covers for Marvel, from the early '60s until the present. His work for Warren's black and white horror and war magazines from the '60s and '70s is also highly regarded by aficionados of his work.*

After retiring from Cracked, *Severin has, in recent years, returned to an old love, westerns. He recently completed a five-issue* Desperadoes *miniseries, and has a* Rawhide Kid *miniseries in the works for Marvel, as well as another western for DC. Though obviously busy, Severin was kind enough to take a break from his drawing board to discuss westerns past, present and future for* CBM *in November of 2002. One word of warning, Severin has a well-developed sense of irony and a sly wit, so readers are advised to remember that certain of Severin's comments about his colleagues were said with tongue firmly in cheek.*

RINGGENBERG: John, you've drawn a lot of westerns in your career. Was that by choice?

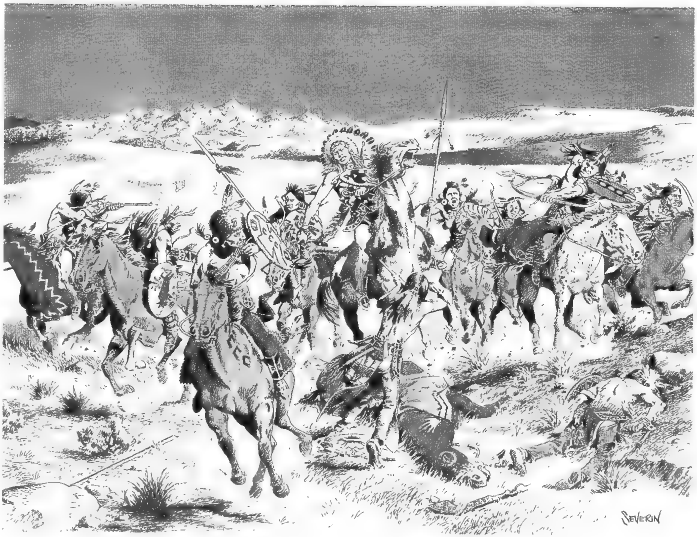
SEVERIN: I think, yes. It seemed two ways. I liked to do them, but it seemed like the editors passed them to me because they seemed to know that I had this feeling. But it was no written down thing. I never said, 'Give me westerns.'

RINGGENBERG: From what I've read, you're a big history buff. Did that figure in your like of westerns?

SEVERIN: No, it figured more in the research end of it, making things accurate, getting the right saddles or getting the right costuming or guns or whatever, that was part of the history thing, and it fitted in with the western stories.

RINGGENBERG: Were you always trying to make your westerns authentic as far as the clothing and incidental details?

SEVERIN: Yes, for the most part. It's more fun for me. I just couldn't stand some of the westerns. They were done so haphazardly. They'd take the movies that were made in the early '30s, late '30s and this was the west. It wasn't the west. It never occurred that way, and it used to annoy the hell out of me. So, in my own fashion I would try to be as accurate as possible, and still stick to the script, of course.



RINGGENBERG: Well, in your quest for accuracy, what kind of western reference would you use?

SEVERIN: Oh, man alive, I've got bookshelves full of all sorts of crap. I've got books on saddles, books on weapons, books on the history of the western, you know, the Spanish West, and then our pioneers and working its way up. The cowboys were a part of it, of course they were the most colorful part I suppose to everybody. I have an awful lot of research on the stuff. The worst part is when I don't know something and I try to remember what book it's in.

RINGGENBERG: Are there any particular westerns that influenced your approach to how you drew them as far as the films?

SEVERIN: Oh, no. I rarely involved myself with the films. I loved some of them, but they didn't have to be accurate for me to like them. For instance, I enjoyed the tar out of John Wayne's stuff, but hell, there wasn't a heck of a lot of accuracy there. He did the late 1930 westerns. He brought them up to date and gave them a lot more guts and I enjoyed them. Oh, there's a new guy out there, Tom Selleck. He does some remarkably nice stuff.

RINGGENBERG: Yeah. I know he's done a lot of westerns for cable TV.

SEVERIN: Yeah. I like him in those westerns. He fits very well.

RINGGENBERG: Yes, and he often works with Sam Elliot, another excellent character actor.

SEVERIN: Yeah, there's another guy I like a lot. I don't think I answered your question. I got myself bypassed.

RINGGENBERG: I was asking if any western film had ever particularly influenced you?

SEVERIN: Oh, no. No.

RINGGENBERG: Did you like director Sam Peckinpah's stuff? *The Wild Bunch* or *Ride the High Country*?

SEVERIN: Oh, they were enjoyable, but they were strictly blood and guts. There was nothing there except pure entertainment. They didn't impress me greatly.

RINGGENBERG: Besides westerns, is there a particular historical period you like to draw?

SEVERIN: I don't know. I suppose the Civil War, but as a matter of fact, almost any historical warfare is exciting to me as long as I have the uniforms and the right equipment.

RINGGENBERG: Has history been a lifelong interest?

SEVERIN: Yes, more or less. I've got drawings from way back before I was in high school. I was drawing Scottish highlanders battling the British. I guess it's been a lifelong thing.

RINGGENBERG: Did you enjoy editing *Two-Fisted Tales* and how you could throw in the westerns and draw whatever you wanted?

SEVERIN: Yeah. Well, naturally I enjoyed that.

RINGGENBERG: Tell me, back at the time when you did those three issues that you did all by yourself, was it tough making your deadlines?

SEVERIN: Not especially. No, I don't remember having any more trouble than usual. I don't think I did them all. Wasn't Reed Crandall in there all the time, and...?

RINGGENBERG: I'm pulling down the Russ Cochran books. Yeah, the very last issue, it went back to being an anthology by everybody. I believe the issues you edited were 36 through 39. NO, the first story in issue 36 is a Jack Davis job, so I was wrong. And then there's a Reed Crandall story.

SEVERIN: I didn't think I did them all. Yeah, if I was to edit that thing today, I would pick a variety of artists. I don't think that any one artist, unless he's really, really something, is going to carry a book issue after issue. I think the nearest thing to that is Moebius, you know, with his Lt. Blueberry, he can carry the thing right on. He's got good stories and good artwork, and pretty good accuracy with his details and all.

RINGGENBERG: Are you a fan of Moebius's stuff?

SEVERIN: I like his stuff a lot. Let's put it that way. Everybody's a fan of something. I like his stuff very much, and I think he works real hard to get what he gets. Mostly, I love that coloring.

RINGGENBERG: Actually, John, I flipped through the *Two-Fisted Tales* volume further in. Starting with issue #37, 38 and 39 were all you.

SEVERIN: Oh, Really? Hooray for me.

RINGGENBERG: One thing I noticed is that you mixed up the stories. You had the Ruby Ed Coffee stories, which were set in contemporary times, and you'd usually throw in a western, and then you had some stuff with the British fighting the Afghanis.

SEVERIN: Oh, yeah. Jerry DeFuccio wrote that.

RINGGENBERG: Right. And then there were several westerns in each issue.

SEVERIN: Well, there would be. (Colin) Dawkins and I loved to do westerns. He'd write 'em and I'd draw 'em.

RINGGENBERG: Were your collaborations with Dawkins fairly satisfying?

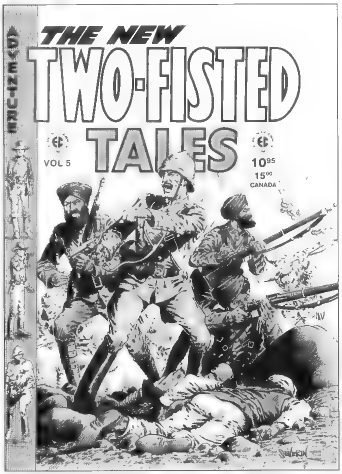
SEVERIN: Oh, yes. The same with Jerry DeFuccio. The same thinking, you know. We all thought along the same lines, and so it was easy to talk to one another without saying a word.

RINGGENBERG: Would you ever go to Colin or Jerry or one of your other writers and say, 'I want to draw such and such?'

SEVERIN: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, I would break down a storyline without any script, panel by panel, page by page, and hand it to him, and he would write it altering any darn thing he felt like. Sometimes we'd sit down and work them out together. But he was definitely the writer. He would put in all the details. It was like I was writing it myself because we'd been talking and thinking along the same lines for years and years and years.

RINGGENBERG: Now, I know that you worked with Dawkins a little bit at EC and then on the *American Eagle* strip. How did you meet him?

SEVERIN: Oh, I went to school with him.



RINGGENBERG: High school?

SEVERIN: Yeah. Went all through high school and well, until the day he died. Yes, we were pals.

RINGGENBERG: Yeah, it seems like you two did a lot of work together over the years.

SEVERIN: We did. We enjoyed it.

RINGGENBERG: Did you reach a point when you stopped working with him.

SEVERIN: No, it wasn't that. We stopped, but it wasn't because either one of us decided to, it was simply his work would take him in his direction and my work was getting so heavy in the other direction. For instance, when I got into *Cracked* magazine. I spent forty-odd years doing that, and there really wasn't any room for Dawkins to work in *Cracked*, and what few jobs I did off and on besides *Cracked*, they were from other companies. They weren't through Dawkins or our connection.

RINGGENBERG: Actually, bringing up *Cracked* reminds me of something I wanted to ask you. You know, Jack Davis left *Mad* and then went back to work for Bill Gaines and worked for him a lot, but you never did. I was wondering why you went with *Cracked* instead of working for *Mad* again.

SEVERIN: Well, they were paying me more; it was better, money-wise.

RINGGENBERG: Really?

SEVERIN: Oh, yeah. And not only that, but you would only be able to do one job for *Mad*, but with *Cracked* I could just keep working. They were paying me the same as they were at *Mad*, if not more sometimes. We're in the business for the money, and that's where the money was—at *Cracked*.

RINGGENBERG: I'd always wondered about that. I wondered if maybe you'd had a falling-out with Bill Gaines or something.

SEVERIN: Oh, no. I never had any problem with Bill Gaines. Bill had a real good way of operating. Everybody knew how much work they were going to get at all times. As a matter of fact, the reason I left *Mad* in the first place was Harvey couldn't keep up with his deadlines on all his books, so he asked me if I'd edit *Two-Fisted Tales*. And he said, "There's only one problem, you'll have to drop out of *Mad*." So that's what happened. I got hold of Dawkins and between the two of us we worked out the stories that were going to go into *Two-Fisted Tales*. And when *Two-Fisted* dropped, *Cracked* came along, and Good Lord, they were offering me as much as I would have had at *Mad*, and they were giving me more work. So, I just stayed with them through the years.

RINGGENBERG: *Cracked* started around '58, right?

SEVERIN: Oh, gee whiz, don't give me dates. I have no idea.

RINGGENBERG: I'm thinking late fifties. Were you at *Cracked* when the whole comic book business sort of tanked, and is that what you were doing during those lean years?

SEVERIN: As I say, I don't remember. What happened when Atlas, Timely, Marvel, whoever they were, dropped us all, I just went over to DC and started working for them and it gets very vague. Out of the clear blue sky, Sol Brodsky asked me if I wanted to go to work for this new magazine, and I said, yeah, and that was it. I don't remember all the in-between stuff. All those little details are quite unimportant.

RINGGENBERG: So, are you always looking to the future, John?

SEVERIN: Well, you have to, to a certain extent. It's going to be there. Today's the most important thing. If you can work out today pretty good, tomorrow—it's like taking a walk. If you don't step in something with your left foot, your right foot's pretty good. You know, it goes on like that.

RINGGENBERG: Have you ever had any periods when you were really scrounging for work?

SEVERIN: Yes, but they'd only last maybe a week or two. But that happens with everybody. You know, you hit a certain point where nobody's handing out jobs to you. But out of a clear blue sky, somebody shows up with something and you're back on the ball. But, that's the way the business is. Anybody that's freelancing goes through that sort of thing. It doesn't matter if you're a movie star or what.

RINGGENBERG: These days, are you getting as much work as you want?

SEVERIN: Yes, as a matter of fact. The only problem I have is

I can't put in the amount of time I would like to on the work. But, aside from that, I'm getting along just fine.

RINGGENBERG: Okay, why don't you tell me about what your current projects are?

SEVERIN: I'm not going to tell you. It's a secret.

RINGGENBERG: Oh, okay.

SEVERIN: But, I'll tell you. What the hell. In honor of Russ Cochran. I'm working for Marvel doing *The Rawhide Kid* at the moment, and just finishing up the last book of a series, and then I have a job coming up with DC, and then back with Marvel. But, there's nothing much to tell you, unless I tell you about the Rawhide Kid story.

RINGGENBERG: Well, what can you tell me about it?

SEVERIN: It's kind of weird. (Laughs) I guess, yeah, I think the information is already out there. The Rawhide Kid is rather effeminate in this story. It may be quite a blow to some of the old fans of Rawhide Kid. But it's a lot of fun and he's still a tough hombre.

RINGGENBERG: Is this a miniseries, or a one-shot?

SEVERIN: No, it's five issues.

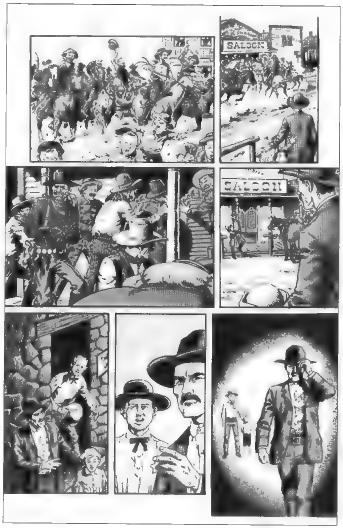
RINGGENBERG: Are you doing all of them?

SEVERIN: Yes. I'm just finishing up the fifth one now.

RINGGENBERG: Good. Are they letting you do the covers?

SEVERIN: No. There are strange people doing them. I don't mean they're strange, I mean I don't know who they are. Of course I don't know the names of most people in comics anymore.

RINGGENBERG: Yeah. I'm in the same boat. My tastes are



hopelessly retro. You know, I'm still looking at Hal Foster and Alex Raymond.

SEVERIN: Same here. As a matter of fact, it's a funny thing. I've been looking at Alex Raymond recently, and I only have two books of his and I realize I don't like him. I don't like his stuff. Isn't that awful? After all these years?

RINGGENBERG: Well, you know, tastes change.

SEVERIN: Well, they sure did with me. Oh well. But, God Bless Him. He really was entertaining in his day.

RINGGENBERG: Yeah, but I think time has shown that Foster really was a better artist, even though I love Raymond.

SEVERIN: Well, Foster, you can hardly argue about him. His stuff was above and beyond.

RINGGENBERG: John, this may sound like an odd comment, but remembering your *King Kull* strips, that always kind of reminded me of a cross between a western and *Prince Valiant*.

SEVERIN: (Laughs) That's interesting.

RINGGENBERG: You definitely evoked that sort of antique atmosphere, but you had all the horses and the battles and it reminded me very much of a western in a lot of ways.

SEVERIN: You know, a lot of that credit goes to my sister's breakdowns. I may have done the embellishment, but give her the credit for that stuff, you know, as well as me.

RINGGENBERG: Oh, yeah. I think that's one of the finest things that you and your sister did together.

SEVERIN: It was a lot of fun.

RINGGENBERG: I think one of the things I liked about it so much was that you created a complete environment, the world of King Kull, and it was believable. You know, you had the details, just the little details in the rooms.

SEVERIN: Those are the kind of things that I always like to put in. You forget, when you're doing a story, there are other people around that aren't necessarily in the script and speaking. Maybe a dog in the street, anything, you know? Just put those little things in and, as you say, it makes it more real.

RINGGENBERG: Well, let me ask you, have you managed to hang on to much of your original art over the years?

SEVERIN: No. When you worked for Marvel you never got it. And when I worked for *Cracked*, there was thirty years of my art that was lifted. Most of the stuff that you see of mine out there, most of it, not all of it, but a good eighty-five to ninety percent of it has been lifted from somewhere. What jobs I have gotten are mostly adventure or war stuff, that sort of thing. And I've spread it amongst the kids, who in turn spread it out to their kids, and my God, it's gotten down to great-grandkids, so it'll probably end up that everybody'll have one page. But, most of my stuff has been lifted.

RINGGENBERG: You don't have any of the Warren jobs or the DC war jobs or anything?

SEVERIN: Um, no. I...Warren jobs? Let me think. No, I don't have any of the Warren jobs. Who else was that?

RINGGENBERG: The DC war jobs. Because when you were doing stuff for them during the early seventies, wasn't that during the period when they were starting to give the art back?

SEVERIN: Yeah. It seems to me that I have a couple of pages of "The Losers."

RINGGENBERG: Yes, because you did a fairly good run on that with Archie Goodwin.

SEVERIN: Yeah, oh, there's another good writer. A good writer, and a good guy. A real funny thing. A long time ago, Dawkins and I wrote a script, a western. And in it, the guy had an over-and-under weapon, a rifle. And I made the thing up. It just fit in the story and I just made it up, and nobody was the wiser, but I figured what the hell? And it worked out

well in the story because this guy fired his shot, and the bad guy didn't realize that he had a second shot, which was a shotgun. And Archie saw it somewhere and he wrote it in a script that I did for him about the incursion of Pancho Villa into Texas. And he gave the sheriff of the town that kind of a gun, see? So I called Archie up and I said, 'Where the hell did you get that gun? I didn't know there was a gun like that.' And he said, 'You ought to know. I swiped it from one of your stories.' Son of a gun! So, there you could start something off, you could make something up and people think that just because you usually do accurate stuff, that everything you do is accurate. Here he had picked up this rifle that I had made up and used it in his story, thinking it was a real thing.

RINGGENBERG: I think I remember that story, too.

SEVERIN: The bandits were coming across this bridge. A pilot had landed in this town.

RINGGENBERG: That was in *Savage Tales*, when they revived it.

SEVERIN: So, that's where it was. Yeah.

RINGGENBERG: When I was buying that magazine, your stuff, and Gray Morrow and Herb Trimpe, that's what I was buying it for. I wasn't too interested in anything else that was in the magazine, but if I knew there was a Severin story in it, I knew there'd be at least one good story in it.

SEVERIN: That's great. That's great.

(At this point the tape ran out. I was so engrossed in our conversation that I didn't notice it for several minutes, during which our conversation continued. I asked Severin about how he began doing his famous American Eagle *strip for Prize Comics. He told how he got the assignment, then went on to explain how his friend and long-time collaborator Colin Dawkins became the writer on Eagle, replacing the original writer.)*

RINGGENBERG: Okay, go ahead. You were saying that the writer was…

SEVERIN: Okay, I didn't know that this man was the father of Mr. Reese, who was the publisher. And after doing several of these books, I decided that Dawkins would be a much better man to do the Indian stuff, because the two of us could get together on it and it would be better than Jay Alexander, who was doing good, but typical cowboy-Indian type of stuff and I wanted a little more meat to the bone. So I told Mr. Reese that I hadn't liked this Jay Alexander's stuff. God, if I knew what I was saying. Anyhow, it ended up, a long story short, with Dawkins writing the American Eagle. And then it just sort of fell to us to turn out the scripts. We'd get the ideas, we'd turn in the scripts and Crestwood just printed the stuff. They didn't do any editing. I think the only thing they did was the coloring. And then of course, when Joe Kubert came up with his magazine *Sojourn*, why I used the American Eagle. Rather than screw around with the names and copyright, I just dropped the American part of it and called him, the Eagle. And I did the Eagle for those three issues that he had.

RINGGENBERG: Was Eagle in all three?

SEVERIN: Yeah. Well, now wait a minute. There were three issues, and there was enough Eagle for the three. Yeah, I was in all three.

RINGGENBERG: And I remember seeing them reprinted in one of the Warren mags, *The Rook* or something.

SEVERIN: Right. They printed them sideways.

RINGGENBERG: That's right. Because the *Sojourn* magazine had kind of an odd format on the first one.

SEVERIN: Yeah, well, it was big like a newspaper.

And part of the idea was good. I kind of go along with it. It just happened that either the timing was wrong or something, I don't know, but I think it was a pretty fair idea because large pages like that with halfway decent artwork, it should have been good.

RINGGENBERG: He certainly had good people in it. He had you and himself and Dick Giordano.

SEVERIN: Well, he's all right. Joe Kubert's all right, if you have to use him. He's a good guy. What the hell. You can throw him in. Good old Joe.

RINGGENBERG: I've always loved his stuff. As a kid, I grew up on him doing Sgt. Rock, and later I discovered you doing the inks on Sgt. Fury for many, many years. I was always disappointed when somebody besides you drew it because the stuff was never as authentic. You always got the gear, the web gear and weapons right.

SEVERIN: I'd have to change everything because the other guy was a typical comic guy, you know, he may have gotten the pictures all good and right, and the continuity, etcetera. It wasn't his fault. I was this way with everybody. If the bolt was in the wrong place and I knew where it really should be, I'd put it there, regardless of where he had it. And I don't know if sometimes the pencilers used to get annoyed at me when I'd change things like that, but it was sort of for our own good. I wasn't goofing the penciler, I was just trying to help the book along.

RINGGENBERG: Well, I know that just from my perspective, when you were inking *The Hulk*, the way you'd do the military hardware accurately always made it seem more believable to me.

SEVERIN: Well, I'm glad. Of course that's exactly the reason that I would do it. As a matter of fact, that's one of the reasons that I never got into fantasy, and I wasn't much for science fiction simply because I don't go for that stuff. I don't believe it. I'm still trying to be convinced that we really landed on the moon. (Laughs) At least that's the kind of thinking I use. I'm not serious about that, please. It's that sort of thing. When you start doing unreal things, good Lord, you can do anything. There's no logic any longer, you know. Things follow a certain way. If there's a nail and a hammer and you hit the nail, it goes into the wood or what have you. But with fantasy, anything could happen when you hit the nail. And I don't like that. That's disturbing to me. And yet, I remember when I was a kid, I used to read a hell of a lot of fantasy and science fiction, but never got around to getting interested enough to draw it.

RINGGENBERG: Yet, you did do Kull and Conan and you made those worlds very believable.

SEVERIN: But you see, I tried to make them believable even though they're fantasy, in the sense that there's no historical record of these civilizations ever existing. That didn't stop me too much as long as we stayed within that period.

RINGGENBERG: When you were doing fantasy stuff like that, what did you base your costuming and architecture on? Were you looking at real historical models?

SEVERIN: No. In the first place, as I said, my sister did most of that layout. So, if I did anything to the architecture, it was in addition to what she had already put down. I had no particular period in mind, because you couldn't have any...What would you put in there? The Indus Valley, the people of ancient Greece or ancient Egypt before the Egyptians were even there? You know, there was no way, because you would be identifying it with something that, even if you made it real, would make it unreal because it wouldn't be true at that point. You had to go strictly

DESPITE SPREADING FIRE, A HOTEL TELEPHONE OPERATOR GETS A CALL FOR HELP THROUGH TO NEARBY DEMING. WITH DAWN, THE RAIDERS ARE IN FLIGHT, PURSUED BY THE 13TH CAVALRY, LEAVING MORE THAN A HUNDRED OF THEIR DEAD BEHIND THEM
THE CHASE DOES NOT STOP AT THE BORDER. IT CONTINUES SOME FIFTEEN MILES SOUTH INTO THE STATE OF CHIHUAHUA...

fantasy, but it had to be constructed properly, even in a fantasy. Bricks had to be held together with mortar, cement or what-have-you. So, well, I'm getting myself tangled up…

RINGGENBERG: No. No. I was following your thread there. Yeah, I was just thinking of that Conan graphic novel you did, which was you all by yourself. It was *Conan the Reaver*. One thing that struck me as really odd about that book is that there was not a single caption in the entire book. And I remember Don Kraar wrote it, and it was edited by Larry Hama. And I had tried to pitch Larry some stuff, oh, years ago, back in the mid-'80s when he was editing the Conan magazines and I remember him saying something about not liking captions. And I looked at that graphic novel and I thought, well it figures. Hama edited it, so there are no captions in the script.

SEVERIN: I didn't even realize that.

RINGGENBERG: It gave it a real odd feel.

SEVERIN: Yeah, well when you get used to a certain format and they drop something out of that format, you spot it. But since I don't read it, I draw it, I wasn't quite aware of the fact that there were no captions. I'm going to look back on that, not to prove a point, but just to see it. I don't know where it is.

RINGGENBERG: Usually, in a comic, there are at least one or two captions, a "Meanwhile" or something, but not a one.

SEVERIN: If the story was told regardless of that, what the heck's the difference?

RINGGENBERG: True. It worked for that story. That was a good take on Conan. I was sorry you never did more with that character.

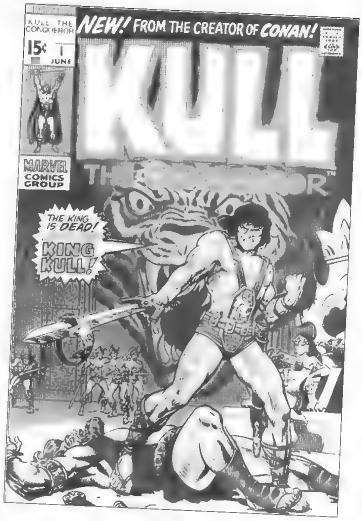
SEVERIN: Well, they had other guys who were really into Conan, and what the heck—let them do it. I wouldn't have minded going on and doing more Kull, you know. But why should I reintroduce myself into Conan that they had already been working on. These people had all made, as a matter of fact, the first guy that did (Conan), Barry Smith, his drawing has improved a hundred thousand percent, but his feel for Conan in the early stories was the best. After that, he just got to be a very big muscled man. It was okay, but I'm not interested in that stuff.

RINGGENBERG: I agree, John. Smith's drawing wasn't really up to par in the beginning, but the strip had atmosphere. And then when Buscema did it, he was more like just a big brawny super-hero guy with a sword.

SEVERIN: Yeah, I don't go for that stuff…I shouldn't be criticizing because I just don't care for that sort of thing.

RINGGENBERG: Speaking of Kull, I was curious. Why did you stop doing the book when you did? You and Marie only did about ten issues.

SEVERIN: I don't know. I have no idea why it stopped. Most likely, they wanted to put all their efforts into Conan, which was more popular, for whatever reason. Too bad they didn't bring Barry Smith back.



RINGGENBERG: It would be nice to see him do some more on it. I think he did some covers when they started reprinting it.

SEVERIN: Oh, good. I missed that.

RINGGENBERG: Boy, Smith is somebody who really grew.

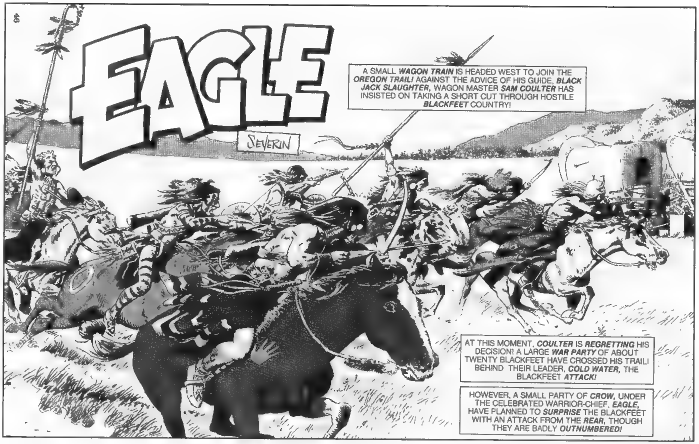
SEVERIN: He sure did. Man alive! It's like the difference between a stick figure and Hogarth. Wham! Bam! Just like that.

RINGGENBERG: Speaking of artists, John. Who've been your biggest art influences over the years?

SEVERIN: Well, they weren't comic people, unless you want me to tell you some.

RINGGENBERG: Sure. Just anybody who's influenced how you draw and how you look at art. That's what I'm curious about.

SEVERIN: Nobody in the comic field. I liked a lot of people in the comic field, but nobody especially in the comic field. I would say that, well, I guess, what's his name, Foster. But I was inter-


EAGLE
SEVERIN
A SMALL WAGON TRAIN IS HEADED WEST TO JOIN THE OREGON TRAIL! AGAINST THE ADVICE OF HIS GUIDE, BLACK JACK SLAUGHTER, WAGON MASTER SAM COULTER HAS INSISTED ON TAKING A SHORT CUT THROUGH HOSTILE BLACKFEET COUNTRY!
AT THIS MOMENT, COULTER IS REGRETTING HIS DECISION! A LARGE WAR PARTY OF ABOUT TWENTY BLACKFEET HAVE CROSSED HIS TRAIL! BEHIND THEIR LEADER, COLD WATER, THE BLACKFEET ATTACK!
HOWEVER, A SMALL PARTY OF CROW, UNDER THE CELEBRATED WARRIOR-CHIEF, EAGLE, HAVE PLANNED TO SURPRISE THE BLACKFEET WITH AN ATTACK FROM THE REAR, THOUGH THEY ARE BADLY OUTNUMBERED!

ested in Foster when I was a kid and he was doing *Tarzan* in the newspaper in black and white, a little strip across the top of the page before he even got to do the full Sunday page in color, and Charlie Russell, the western artist. I always liked his stuff. When I got in the service I was made aware of Bill Mauldin, and I was very interested in him, but man, that's crazy, Mauldin, Charlie Russell and Foster…In the comic field, it's a lot different. I just liked certain guys, and if somebody did something a certain way and it looked like it worked, I'd swipe it. I'd do it myself if I could. I'd do it in my own fashion of course. I couldn't…for instance, imagine me doing an Al Toth. I might take from Al Toth, but it would never look like Al Toth.

There is a guy that I really admire, Al Toth. And we can't leave out that fellow you mentioned. What was his name?

RINGGENBERG: Oh, that Kubert guy.

SEVERIN: Yeah, him. We can't leave him out. He's pretty good. He's got a couple of kids and you know, they're all right. (Laughter) Man, that's a family isn't it?

RINGGENBERG: Yeah, I guess Joe taught them right.

SEVERIN: He sure did.

RINGGENBERG: Yeah, his sons are excellent.

SEVERIN: Yeah, they are. I have a son-in-law that's a comic fan and he likes the Kuberts.

RINGGENBERG: Are you planning on doing any more Desperado strips?

SEVERIN: No, I'm not. I don't think so. I wouldn't mind doing them. They were pretty good.

RINGGENBERG: Yeah. It came out well. I thought it was

just a real odd juxtaposition of the western with the supernatural elements.

SEVERIN: Yeah. At first that threw me, but then I just rode along with it. And when I rode along, it went off fine. It didn't bother me a bit. I started to have fun with it. About the time we got into that little Mexican, whatever in the world he's supposed to be, when I got to him and started putting all the strange signs on his building and all that, by that time I had gotten into it and the supernatural wasn't bothering me at all.

RINGGENBERG: And is most of the stuff that you're currently doing westerns?

SEVERIN: Yeah. As a matter of fact, well, right now, the two things I'm doing now, yeah. I have another job coming up for DC—it's a western.

RINGGENBERG: Is it with one of their existing western characters or something new?

SEVERIN: No, I've forgotten the name of who it is, but it's.... The only thing I can tell you that I can remember is, the person that I'm drawing as the hero is the grandfather or the great-grandfather of a present-day hero that DC is already doing. And I read the script and I have to re-read the darn thing because if I don't get right to work on something and get into it, I forget the thing because I have to get back to what I'm already doing. And I put my whole mind on to what I'm doing at the moment, and so, a lot of that story has drifted. But I have picked up some research for it and put it aside, but...I haven't done much of anything. So, anyhow until I finish the Rawhide Kid, I won't loosen up and get on to the next thing.

RINGGENBERG: Do you know when the Rawhide Kid series is supposed to be out?

SEVERIN: No, not exactly. I know it's somewhere in the beginning of the year. They gave me a date, but Good Lord, that's a waste of time. I don't even remember my own birthday.

RINGGENBERG: Okay. John, these days, I know you've been inking yourself for years, but how fast can you do a page?

SEVERIN: It depends. Slow, slower, or really, really slow. I'm not too fast. It depends on the story. Really and truly. If there's mucho details, I'll go into it. I'll put the time into it, and I may only get half a page done. If it's a little slicker and I've already done enough details to carry it, I can get a page done. But the days when I could do a page and a half, two pages are over. I mean there are too many things happening around here and with thirteen grandkids, it kind of slows things down a bit. So, well, anyhow I'm going as fast as I can and I have to explain to editors, I'm going as fast as I can.

RINGGENBERG: Do all of your grandkids live around you up in Colorado?

SEVERIN: Oh, let's see. One, two, three, no. Three of them are out of state, and they're also out of the will as a result.

RINGGENBERG: Too bad for them. John, when you are doing a page do you pencil very tight or do you do the finishing in the inking?

SEVERIN: I do the finishing in the inking. But my pencils are, it depends again, on whether this is a costume...For instance, with the Rawhide Kid, [there's] a lot of garbage on his costume, so after you roughly throw in the figure and you have it all ready to go, you have to stop and go back and put in the buttons on the right place and all the little ribbing, you know. So, it's sort of a combination of tight and loose.

RINGGENBERG: What do you ink with? What sort of pen?

SEVERIN: Oh, Lord. Whatever happens to strike my fancy at the moment. I do a lot of Croquil stuff and I'll use straight pens that are larger, much larger than a Croquil. But a certain amount of pliability and, at the same time, stiff. This sounds really wacky. Let's just say I use pens, any damn pen I can get my hands on.

RINGGENBERG: Do you ever work with markers or anything like that?

SEVERIN: No, because I can't detail with the marker.

RINGGENBERG: Oh, because it bleeds?

SEVERIN: That's right...I don't have to worry about the bleeding because I never use them.

RINGGENBERG: Oh, okay, because I know Toth is big on the markers.

SEVERIN: He keeps trying to tell me through the years, 'Use the markers. Use the markers.' Hell, he got me into Rapidograph pens and that's as far as he's going. He's not going to get me into markers. He used to use Rapidographs all the time. I started buying them. They're very handy, but you can't really and truly ink. You can draw things with them, but you can't ink worth a damn.

RINGGENBERG: It doesn't have a texture.

SEVERIN: Yeah. It has to be straight up and down or the darn thing won't work in the first place.

RINGGENBERG: Do you use brush much?

SEVERIN: No. Only when there's a big area that I have to fill in with ink. Even then, I'm tempted to use a Speedball. But if it's a big area I'll use a brush. No, I don't use brush much. I never could handle it properly. When I first got into comics everybody said, 'You have to use brush.' And it stopped me dead in my tracks. I figured I'd never get into the stuff. And if it weren't for the fact that Bill Gaines and Crestwood allowed me a lot of leeway, you know, I never would have learned how to ink with a pen even, for crying out loud.

RINGGENBERG: Was the stuff that you did for EC the first work of yours that you inked?

SEVERIN: Boy, I don't know. I think…Well, you could sort of put down "Yes." I'm not sure of that. Probably.

RINGGENBERG: Yeah, because there was a long period when you did maybe twenty stories with Will Elder and then all of a sudden you started inking your own stuff.

SEVERIN: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I don't think that I did any work on my own with the exception of some comic stuff, but I think that was after EC anyhow, so it doesn't make…Yeah, let's say EC was the first place I inked on my own.

RINGGENBERG: One thing that was interesting on those three issues of *Two-Fisted* that you did by yourself was that every story you approached with a little different style. Some of it looks like it's done on Ben-day or Duoshade board. And some of it is just straight inking.

SEVERIN: Oh, yeah, well, I fell in love with that Craftint, I guess it's called. Craftint or Duoshade. I fell in love with that and whenever I did a black and white job, boy I stuck to that. Man, I got out all my Roy Cranes and started saying, "What can you do with this Craftint stuff?"

RINGGENBERG: Speaking of Roy Crane, I noticed that one of Ruby Ed's sidekicks looks an awful lot like Captain Easy.

SEVERIN: Isn't that funny? I wonder how come.

RINGGENBERG: Yeah, I wonder about that. I've been meaning to ask you about that for years.

SEVERIN: I just drew Captain Easy is what I did. That Ruby Ed [character] was Dawkins' idea. We sort of wrapped a couple of characters up in our minds. Doc Savage is one of them, but we toned that down because he didn't want too much of the science fiction stuff in there. However, I did swipe Captain Easy. I couldn't put in Wash Tubbs, but I got Captain Easy in there.

RINGGENBERG: It's funny you should mention Doc Savage. I always thought the Ruby Ed stories were like Doc Savage and Daddy Warbucks.

SEVERIN: Really? Well, yes. As a matter of fact, Dawkins mentioned Daddy Warbucks. He said, "He's sort of a Daddy Warbucks character," in order to educate me as to what he was trying to say. So, you're right.

RINGGENBERG: Well, I guess if you're going to be an adventurer, it helps to be really rich.

SEVERIN: I would have liked to have developed that character more, but it went down the drain with EC. I don't know. What can you do?

Having run through my list of questions, I stopped the tape here, reluctant to keep John Severin away from his drawing board any longer. I realized from speaking with Severin and his wife to set up this interview that between his family commitments and a still-steady stream of assignments, John Severin's time is precious to him. So, I ended the interview by thanking him for his time, grateful for the opportunity to chat with one of my favorite artists, a man who is inarguably one of the all-time greats of western comics.

The Two-Gun Kid: The Silver Age Western Super-Hero

by Raymond A. Cuthbert

My story begins in 1963—not long after I had started collecting comic books. I was eight years old and visiting a friend's house. Gordie Dunn lived right across the street from me. My comic book collection was begun with a pile handed down to me by my older brother, also named Gord. I traded and swapped with friends and began buying my own comics by saving up my five-cent-a-week allowance until I could accumulate the necessary 12 cents to buy one. The books I bought were DCs—every single one of them—taking brother Gord's advice that "the Superman comics were the best ones..."

Anyway, over at Gordie Dunn's house I discovered a different kind of comic from those I'd been used to. It wasn't like the funny animal comics I traded away for the DCs, and it wasn't much like DCs, either—to me, they looked like crude imitations. But those two comics Gordie Dunn had stuck in my mind—*Fantastic Four* #11 and *Two-Gun Kid* #60.

Flash-forward to 1999 where the adult and greying-haired Ray Cuthbert has long since transcended his dislike for Marvel Comics and has also moved from collecting comic books as a primary passion for his free time to the collection of original comic art. Unfortunately for him, Jack Kirby originals have shot through the roof, price-wise, and so he's decided that what he wants to do is aim for a nice Silver Age page, which is not likely to be exorbitantly priced. Ray remembers his first two Marvel comics—both with art by Jack Kirby—and he knows he's unlikely to be able to afford any page from *FF* #11 any time in the near future, but the equally-memorable story from *Two-Gun Kid* #60 could possibly provide an affordable original. The reasoning behind that estimation follows.

In the early days of Marvel Comics, Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Dick Ayers, Steve Ditko and Don Heck principally created one triumph after another as they moved away from the dominant themes of the 1950s Atlas books—monsters and westerns—into the new domain of Marvel books. In the first 13 months of their new entry into the super-hero genre a number of exciting things were going on. Let's take a look at what was published in those 13 months under the newly-revised Marvel flag. I shall use publication dates as printed on the comic books rather than the actual release dates for this chronology.

In November 1961, *Fantastic Four* #1 was published, the sole super-hero Marvel title. Things were quiet at first. January 1962 produced *FF* #2 and in their monster title *Tales to Astonish* #27 Henry Pym shrunk down to become "The Man in the Anthill," and later on, Antman. March 1962 produced *FF* #3. In May 1962, not only was the Submariner reintroduced (in *FF* #4) but also a companion title of super-hero content: *The Incredible Hulk* #1. In July 1962 *FF* #5 and *Hulk* #2 were released. Finally, in August 1962, two former "monster-themed" titles went super-hero, allowing Marvel to have super-heroes on the stands two months in a row. *Journey Into Mystery* #83 introduced Thor, and *Amazing Fantasy* #15 featured a try-out for a weird character called Spider-Man. From September 1962 onwards, Marvel was producing an actual line of super-hero books on a monthly basis. There was *FF* #6, *Hulk* #3, *JIM* #84, and another monster title converted to super-heroes (with a monster story's protagonist becoming the super-hero)—*Tales to Astonish* #35 with Ant-Man, formerly Henry Pym. October 1962 saw *FF* #7, *JIM* #85, *TTA* #36 and the Human Torch from the FF getting a solo series in *Strange Tales* #101. Thus ended the first 12 months of Marvel super-heroes.

TWO-GUN KID
12¢
60
NOV.
WHAT IS THE STRANGE SECRET OF JAITY MANOR?
WHY DOES MARY CARTER DESPISE THE TWO-GUN KID?
CAN THE KID ALONE DEFEAT A GANG OF GUN-MENACES?
HOW DID BEN HAMLIN CHANGE THE KID'S LIFE?

Two-Gun Kid #60—The first Silver Age and the first Marvel issue of the Two-Gun Kid.

November 1962 was the thirteenth month of Marvel super-heroes, and a new one was introduced; but since no super-hero titles were produced in December 1961, or February, April and June 1962, it marked only the ninth month in Marvel's Silver Age in which super-heroes were

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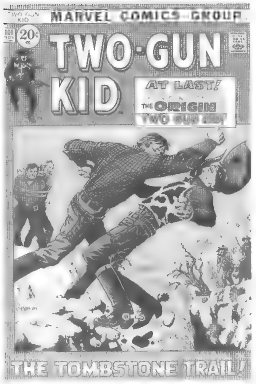
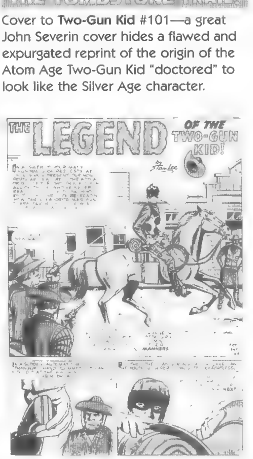
launched, and that super-hero has *never* been remembered as a super-hero. Along with *FF* #8, *Hulk* #4, *IIM* #86, *TTA* #37 and *ST* #102 came *Two-Gun Kid* #60. You heard me correctly, *Two-Gun Kid* #60 was Marvel's next entry into the super-hero market!

Up until *TGK* #60, the title had been owned by another character with the same name, whom the protagonist of #60 believed was a "fictional character I heard about back East." *TGK* #60 attempted to introduce Marvel's super-hero audience to Matt Hawk, the new Two-Gun Kid. But folks who wanted super-heroes were not really listening. Monster titles transferred to super-heroes with the blink of an eye, but westerns? Westerns have been and always will be westerns, Zorro and The Lone Ranger notwithstanding.

Two-Gun Kid was one of three successful "Kid" western titles for Marvel. The other two successful "Kids" being Kid Colt and Rawhide Kid. As an aside, it is interesting to note that of the three most successful Marvel "Kids" only Rawhide failed to wear a vest made of leather or cowhide, yet he had the name "Rawhide"! Both of these other western "Kid" titles remained unchanged in the transition from Atlas to Marvel. Only *Two-Gun Kid* introduced a new character into the old name, and only *Two-Gun Kid* attempted to use the Lee and Kirby Marvel super-hero formula. In addition, *Two-Gun Kid* went through a period of suspended publication from #59 (Apr 1961) to #60 (Nov 1962). Because DC held Marvel's publication levels, the only way to make room for *Two-Gun Kid* to come back onto the publication schedule was to eliminate another title in its publication line-up. The title that was eliminated to make way for the Silver Age *Two-Gun Kid* was none other than *Amazing Fantasy*, which ended its run with the rather inconsequential *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (!).



Cover to **Two-Gun Kid** #101—a great John Severin cover hides a flawed and expurgated reprint of the origin of the Atom Age Two-Gun Kid "doctored" to look like the Silver Age character.



Page 1 of doctored origin story from #101—note the sloppy job of inking in a mask where none was present in the original printing of the story.

Let's see whether or not Matt Hawk qualifies as a Marvel super-hero. He faces adversity and takes on a secret identity. The hero persona is bold, brave and daring; the "civilian" persona is a bookish fellow from down East—a lawyer and a dude. That sounds familiar, especially if we allow for the "dude" characterization to be an antiquated version of a "geek" or a "bookworm"—remember Peter Parker was introduced by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko only three months prior.

He also gets involved with a girl who is in love with one persona, but who hates the other persona—the classic triangle of double identities which goes back even further than Clark Kent. More than any other Marvel hero, with the possible exception of Matt Murdock's Daredevil who was still nearly a year and a half away from conception, Matt Hawk was like Thor's Don Blake, also originated only three months prior. The female lead was interested in the bookish identity, not the flashy persona of the hero. In some of the art panels, with the exception of the fact that it was Matt Hawk's brown hair and period costume, you could swear that was Don Blake facing his Marvel "hang-ups"!

The origin story was a well-crafted little thirteen-page tale in which a dude, Matt Hawk, goes to the rescue of a wizened old gunslinger with the marvelous name of "Ben Dancer" who has become the target of younger gunmen looking to gain a reputation. Dancer, who nearly steals the show a couple of times in the origin story, becomes a mentor to Hawk and convinces him that in order to avoid his fate as a hunted gunman chased merely for his reputation, Hawk needs to adopt a hidden identity. The origin story ends with Hawk preventing a stagecoach holdup, teaming with Ben Dancer once again, and riding away because while wearing a mask, he would be too big a target to men with badges.

THE BEGINNING OF
the TWO-GUN KID
HEY! GIT A LOAD OF THAT THERE PINK-CHEEKED DUDE! EVER SEE SUCH A SIGHT?!
GIT YOUR GUNS, BOYS! WE DON'T GIT US A DUDE STRANGER IN TOMBSTONE VERY OFTEN! RECKON WE OUGHTA CELEBRATE THE OCCASION WITH A LITTLE DANCE!
THE DAY YOUNG MATT HAWK FIRST CAME TO THE TOWN OF TOMBSTONE, TEXAS, WAS A DAY THE WEST WOULD NEVER FORGET! AND THIS IS THE REASON WHY...
STAN LEE — J. KIRBY
V-500

Page 1 of Two-Gun Kid #60 black and white—shot from the original art.

Does the Spider-Man theme need any more underlining? Before riding off into the sunset, the Kid releases from arrest the brother of the woman who had befriended him against the bullies he first met when he came to town.

Following November 1962, it was not until March 1963 that Marvel introduced a new Marvel super-hero title (with a character we've seen before), *The Amazing Spider-Man* #1, and simultaneously introduced *Tales of Suspense* #39's Iron Man. Sgt. Fury, a war hero who would later be revamped into the James Bond-type Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D., entered the Marvel Universe with his #1 issue dated May 1963. *Avengers* #1 was not until September 1963, *X-Men* #1 and *Strange Tales* #114 (with Dr. Strange) were November 1963. *Daredevil* #1 would wait until April 1964 and Captain America had first appeared in the Silver Age a month earlier in *Avengers* #4 (March 1964). Cap's own series would wait until November 1964's *Tales of Suspense* #59. Looking at Marvel Silver Age super-heroes chronologically then, we have the following: The FF, Ant-Man, the Sub-Mariner, the Hulk, Thor, Spider-Man, Two-Gun Kid, Iron Man, Sgt. Fury, Dr. Strange, Captain America and Daredevil.

One of these guys has somehow been forgotten. Ask yourselves, how often has the super-hero-type origin story from *Two-Gun Kid* #60 even been reprinted? To the best of my knowledge, only once—in *Two-Gun Kid* #120—and that reprint is not even noted in the *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*! No wonder it's a forgotten classic!

Overstreet Seems Uncertain About #60

From the Silver Age collectors' point of view, there is another reason why *Two-Gun Kid* #60 has been forgotten—the *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*, the collectors' "bible," has never been very clear on what that book contained. The third edition of the *Guide* (1973) first noted that #60 was the origin of the Two-Gun Kid. From the fourth edition onward to the current 32nd edition, #60 was linked with #58. The notation in the fourth edition for both of these issues was "Origin retold." Also with the fourth edition, #101, which reprints #58, was listed with the notation "Origin retold/#58." From the fifth edition onwards to the present the notation regarding #58 and #60 has been "New origin." From the 24th edition to the present an additional notation for #58 has been given: "58—Kirby/Ayers—c/a 'The Monster of Hidden Valley' Cover story (Kirby monster-c)."

I would assert that what the *Overstreet* notations should have indicated is that *Two-Gun Kid* #60 is the origin and first appearance of the Silver Age Two-Gun Kid. Why? Well, the Two-Gun Kid who appeared in issues #1-59 of the title from 1949 to 1962 was a character named Clay Harder, the son of rancher Seth Harder, with a horse named Cyclone. The "Harder" Two-Gun Kid was trained in gunfighting by his father, who had been seriously injured in a gunfight years before, and who forbade his son to use the skills he had taught him "as long as he was alive." The Harder Two-Gun Kid was released from this promise when his father was killed in a raid on their ranch and the Atom Age Two-Gun Kid was born. *Two-Gun Kid* #58's notation in *Overstreet* should be "Origin retold" or "Atom Age origin retold."

From #60 onward, a character by the name of Matt Hawk, a lawyer, adopted a masked identity, which he believed belonged to a fictional character in a manner very similar to that described by Barry Allen in *Showcase* #4 when he adopted the name of The Flash. The new Two-Gun Kid's horse was Thunder, not Cyclone. The Silver Age Two-Gun Kid was a totally different character, not the same character with a different origin. Another item worthy of note is that *Two-Gun Kid* #60 was the first issue of the title to be pub-

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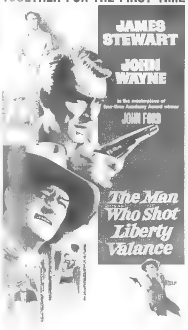
lished under the "Marvel Comics" banner. To my mind, Lee and Kirby went out of their way to make sure that this issue would fit in with the new "Marvel line" that was still in its infancy. More than any other single Marvel western comic, *Two-Gun Kid* #60 was written like a Marvel super-hero title. Unfortunately, due to the press of all the other artwork that Kirby was doing, he was forced to abandon doing the art on the title after #62, aside from a few covers from time to time. The title eventually drifted back into Marvel's western line-up, with less and less emphasis on the triangle involved through Matt Hawk's dual identity.

Marvel Confuses the Issue

As had already been noted, *Two-Gun Kid* #101 reprints the origin of the Atom Age Two-Gun Kid from issue #58, but in so doing, Marvel added to the confusion around this character. When #101 reprinted the origin from #58, the reprint editor noticed that the character was not the masked hero in the most recent continuity. For whatever reason, the Silver Age Two-Gun Kid Matt Hawk origin from #60 was overlooked. The origin from #58 was changed artistically by "blacking in" a mask around the eyes of the Harder Two-Gun Kid, adding the dappled design of cowhide to the character's vest and re-coloring his outfit, which made the story an absolutely ridiculous read. At the beginning of the Atom Age Two-Gun Kid's origin story, Harder rides into town and is bullied by the town rowdies, but silently refuses to respond due to the promise he had made to his father. In the reprint that appeared in #101, the same scenario takes place with the Harder Two-Gun Kid riding into town and being bullied while wearing the Silver Age mask! The mask does not fit in with the origin they reprinted, as the Harder Two-Gun Kid tells the characters who he is without any qualms about a secret identity, and the other characters react to Harder as though he was not wearing any mask whatsoever!

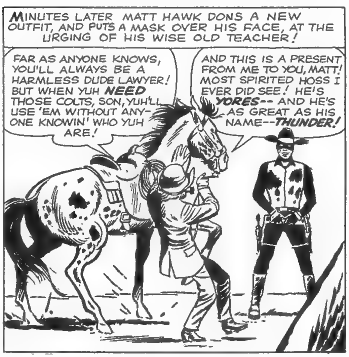
All in all, *Two-Gun Kid* #60 is a forgotten gem in Marvel's Silver Age.



Some Conjecture on the Origin Behind the Origin

I should begin this section by stating up front that I have no anecdotal evidence to substantiate the claim I'm about to make.

I believe that one of the sources for the ideas behind this new origin for the Two-


MINUTES LATER MATT HAWK DONS A NEW OUTFIT, AND PUTS A MASK OVER HIS FACE, AT THE URGING OF HIS WISE OLD TEACHER!
FAR AS ANYONE KNOWS, YOU'LL ALWAYS BE A HARMLESS DUDE LAWYER! BUT WHEN YUH NEED THOSE COLTS, SON, YUH'LL USE 'EM WITHOUT ANY-ONE KNOWIN' WHO YUH ARE!
AND THIS IS A PRESENT FROM ME TO YOU, MATT! MOST SPIRITED HOSS I EVER DID SEE! HE'S YORES-- AND HE'S AS GREAT AS HIS NAME--THUNDER!

Page 7 panel 1 of **Two-Gun Kid** #60—Matt Hawk dresses as the Two-Gun Kid for the first time. (Shot from the original art.).

Gun Kid is John Ford's movie, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, which came out in 1962. The screenwriters for this movie were James Warner Bellah and Willis Goldbeck. They actually based their screenplay on the story by Dorothy M. Johnson. This movie is a complex deconstructionist vision of the Hollywood western legends. In the story, a Senator Ransom Stoddard, played by James Stewart, is propelled into public office by the actions of Tom Donavan, played by John Wayne, his rival for the affections of a lady.

Stoddard came to town as a dude lawyer from back east who is robbed and pistol-whipped by the man named in the title, played by Lee Marvin. Stoddard tries to make a difference to the western town he has taken as his new home by bringing law and education, but in the end finally has to face up to Valance with a pistol himself. The title is a play on the climactic gunfight near the close of the movie where Stoddard (and everyone else) believes that through a lucky fluke, he has managed to kill Valance in a gunfight. It turns out instead that Valance had been killed by (out of camera range) Donavan in order to save Stoddard. Since Donavan killed Valance in a cold-blooded fashion, he could not come forward to admit it. Stoddard's political career and his marriage are based upon a lie.

The movie begins with Stoddard telling his story to an eager newspaper reporter who, at the close of the movie, tears up his notes. In response, Stoddard asks, "You're not going to print the story, Mr. Scott?" To which Scott replies, "This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact—print

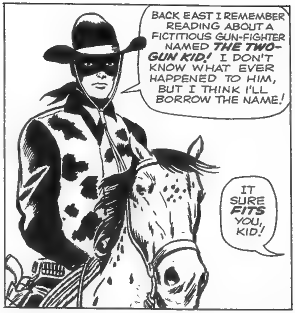
the legend."

With *Two-Gun Kid* #60, Lee and Kirby had Matt Hawk as both Stoddard and Donavan. Hawk was Stoddard the dude lawyer. The Two-Gun Kid was the man who took the law into his own hands.

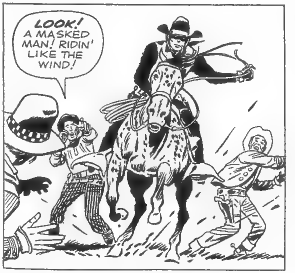
The Art Behind the Story

Place: The San Diego Comic Con 1999—specifically, Pete Koch's table. Lo and behold there is an original page from *Two-Gun Kid* #60 at the table for sale. It was not just *any* page, either, but page 8, the page in which the Silver Age Two-Gun Kid makes his first public appearance. "How much is this?" I ask Pete as nonchalantly as possible. "$400, but another guy's got it on hold. I've got other Kirby Western pages though...." "No Pete, this is the one for me. I've got $400 in cash right now for it." Pete hesitates for a minute and says, "Just a minute. This guy's a friend of Albert [Moy]'s, supposedly some big Kirby collector. I'll see if Albert thinks this first guy's really serious." Albert thinks the guy's serious, but for the rest of the convention the page sits right on Pete's table until the final day when it is finally picked up, and I miss my chance. Or so I thought.

Fast-forward to later that same year. The news is all over the comic original art collectors' market that the Tony Christopher Collection, thought to be the largest collection of Silver Age Jack Kirby original art in the world, has been sold and broken up for resale by three dealers. My friend Gary Land alerts me that a guy who has been selling some of the art on eBay likely has the page I was looking for. I contact the fellow, but he hedges about whether or not he has the page, and will get back to me after he checks his inventory. Not long afterwards, Anthony's Collectibles (not the fellow I'd been in touch with originally) announces that they have a large chunk of the Tony Christopher Collection. When I checked out Anthony's website, I found that he had the page I'd tried to obtain earlier in the year, and not only that page but 11 of the 13 pages to the first and Silver Age origin story. He is selling them as a lot. To make a long story short, I sold and traded some other pieces of artwork in my collection to a third party who makes a deal with Anthony for the Kirby pages on my behalf!


BACK EAST I REMEMBER READING ABOUT A FICTITIOUS GUN-FIGHTER NAMED THE TWO-GUN KID! I DON'T KNOW WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO HIM, BUT I THINK I'LL BORROW THE NAME!
IT SURE FITS YOU, KID!

Page 7 panel 3 of Two-Gun Kid #60—Note the self-conscious reference Stan Lee makes to the former Two-Gun Kid. If Barry Allen was a comic book reader, apparently Matt Hawk read dime novels! (Shot from the original art.).



Page 8 panel 5 of Two-Gun Kid #60—the first public appearance of the Silver Age Two-Gun Kid (shot from the original art.).

Three years later, I am now looking not for *one* Kirby page from *Two-Gun Kid* #60, but for *two*—the only two missing from the origin story. I have learned of the location of one of those two pages, but have been unable to come up with an offer that can tempt it away from the current owner, who bought it from Roz Kirby in about 1995. Secondly, in my search for the other remaining page I e-mailed Kirby collector Steve Robertson, who informed me of another portion of the story of the artwork of which I had been unaware:

> Hi Ray; I used to own page 8 of that story, but traded it to Tony when he was trying to put it together! I'm happy to hear that you've got a line on one of the missing pages, but sorry to say that I don't know the whereabouts of page 6. I will certainly keep my eyes open for it, and if I chance across it, I'll either pick it up for you or let you know where it is. I know it's not in the Kirby estate's holdings, and I know that Mike Thibodeaux (the Kirby's art agent) doesn't have it. I'll be watching for your page! Best, Steve Robertson

I e-mailed Steve back to tell him that I thought Pete Koch had sold the page to Tony Christopher. His response: "Actually, I traded the page to Pete with the understanding that it was going to Tony!" The web of original comic art collectors are tighter than most of us could ever dream!

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The Michael Naiman Report

A Visual Feast

[Ernie Gerber died August 24, 2002, of a heart attack, aged 57. His line of protective storage supplies is now a sister company of Gemstone Publishing.]

Can there be any question that the most important set of books any hardcore comic book collector could own would be anything other than Ernie Gerber's Photo-Journals?

Sure, the Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide lists the books, but would some of the values escalate without the frantic stampede for the next "hot" cover that has been recently discovered while visually window shopping through the Journal?

An untold amount of thanks goes to the late Ernie Gerber. Without his unflagging dedication, the hobby today would be very, very different. The new generation of plastic-slabbed comic book commodity collectors should understand that without Ernie's four volumes, they wouldn't know what to look for, much less appreciate what might be on the inside of each comic.

Some thoughts from the collecting community:

Gary M. Carter: In my view, there have been three seminal publishing events that have dramatically changed the hobby of comic book collecting. In the mid 1960s, the Rocket's Blast and Comic Collector combined forces to create a fanzine which unified a fragmented collector base all over the country. In the early 1970s, the Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide forever legitimized the hobby and the value of rare comics. Then, in the late 1980s, the face of comic book collecting was again inextricably altered. Ernie Gerber's Photo-Journals exposed to the masses what had been known only to a few serious run collectors—that certain, often-unknown, covers were more dynamic, beautiful, and/or iconic than others, and that these special covers were often more desirable than content (even key content, in many cases). This new "cover-awareness" (along with increased values) marked the end of acquiring runs as the dominant collecting mode, and Ernie is wholly responsible for this change. And for upgrading collector awareness of, and knowledge about, these covers. With the publication of the Gerber's Photo-Journals, Ernie single handedly leveled the playing field for the entire hobby and allowed everyone access to information about the great covers previously known only to a few elite collectors and dealers

I hope every serious hobbyist, dealer, and historian understands the profound impact that Ernie's pioneering work has had on the hobby and sees fit to offer Ernie Gerber the (regrettably posthumous) credit he so legitimately deserves!

Jon Berk: If nothing else Ernie was a character. But this character was a visionary who left an indelible imprint on the hobby. Beside his contribution to comic storage with Mylar, it is his Photo-Journals which comic collectors should always consider as The Grail. These books opened a window to the thousands of books out there so that people could expand and tailor their collecting tastes by what they saw. It allowed many to see what they knew they could never find or own. Ernie visited me several times when he did the Photo-Journals. The last was for the Marvel books when he spent two weeks with us—eating meals and chatting with my family. He had a vision for these books and he never let the financial hurdles daunt him. Although his strong beliefs and personality led to several disputes with others in the hobby, I always found him friendly and a true fan of comics. The family of comic book folks is diminished by his absence.

Bill Howard: The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide is often referred to as "The Bible" by many collectors. While I wouldn't argue with this appellation, "The Bible" for me has always been Ernie Gerber's wonderful Photo-Journal Guides. More than any other single reference source, his Photo-Journals opened my eyes to a whole new world of collecting interests. Indeed, I think it is fair to say they helped trigger a renaissance of sorts in the Golden Age of comic books. The Marvel Guides still serve as a key reference and just plain old-fashioned entertainment. Many is a night when, intending to just look up one issue or so, turns into a half hour or more of leafing through its oversized, slick pages—getting lost in cover after cover beautifully photographed and presented. Would that Ernie could have completed a similar set for DC! But, alas, it was not to be.

Keith Contarino: His work in putting together a listing of comics with pictures and scarcity ratings was invaluable. The Gerber Guides enabled me to see covers of Golden Age comics I knew nothing about and started hunting for when I saw them. His scarcity ratings enabled me to put a realistic value when coupled with the Overstreet Price Guide. One could tell that his Guides were works of love as well as a sharing of information.

Doug Sulipa, Comic World: Ernie Gerber will be missed. Few non-creators have attained his stature in our hobby. If there was a Comics Hall of Fame, Ernie deserved to be at the front of the list, at least twice—once for his milestone accomplishments in Mylar and the other for the comics Photo-Journals. These accomplishments have left a permanent mark of excellence that will be remembered for as long as people collect and study comics Ernie was not finished in his accomplishments. Having passed so young, this loss is compounded by the future projects left undone. I hope his accomplishments will serve as a catalyst for others, as they attempt to attain his uncompromising standards.

Terry O'Neill, Terry's Comics: Ernie Gerber was a true entrepreneur. I believe that he indirectly helped the high-grade market become what it is today by providing Mylar to protect and display those beautiful books. I also think that the heavy resurgence in Golden Age collecting in the early 1990s was due to the Photo-Journals allowing the average collector, for the first time, to see what all that text in the Overstreet Price Guide was describing. He made a big mark on our industry but left too early.

Ron Murry, Bigroncomics: I remember when I first received my Photo-Journals. It was a great moment in my personal comic history to have such immediate access to all of those incredible and elusive images that heretofore had only been the stories of comic book legend! Such a comprehensive undertaking must have been both extremely tedious and equally delightful to undertake. To be able to share your work with the masses is truly a wonderful treasure you have left with us, and I appreciate your efforts. Thank you, Ernie. I imagine you are scanning the heavens for us still, in search of those oh-so elusive empty spots in your Journals. With each white space filled, I will imagine your hand guiding the comic book devotee who has discovered this special treasure!

Robert Letscher II, Key Comics: To this day I marvel at the scope and quality of the famed "Gerber books," which show many thousands of hard-to-find comics in a convenient and informative fashion. I confess that I still refer to that invaluable pair of hard covers almost daily—for the pictures, scarcity index and other crucial data!

Dan Greenhalgh, Showcase New England: Ernie Gerber's role in the purchase and promotion of Mile High books was legendary. He had about as high a profile as anyone in his time. His legacy, of course, is his work as reflected in the Gerber Journals—a significant, comprehensive, multiyear effort which captures much of America's lost comic art and makes it viewable for generations to come. It is as much a valuable resource today as it was when it was published more than a decade ago.

****

This and That: Inquiring minds need to know why any auction house would need someone on staff who is a well known restoration expert when everything that is for sale is slabbed? What's the purpose?

How can a slabbed Classics Comic #1 be graded GD/VG when it has a detached cover? On top of it all…it didn't sell for $510…didn't make reserve…Wonder why?

All the way from Canada, Byron Glass reports: Captain Canuck #1 is basically worthless. I've been buying up back issues of CC as I come across them, for distribution through APA-I once I've gathered up 25 comics. About a month ago, I picked up two copies of #1 for $0.50 Canadian each. I don't think I've ever seen a copy of #1 in a comic shop for more than $3. You've got to question the intelligence of anybody who would be willing to pay $116.00. I don't think being a 9.9 grade comic makes it that valuable, does it?

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Congrats to Mick and Pam Rabin on the arrival of Monica on 11/30/02!

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I had quite a few emails commenting on the last comic strip that ran in this column—and they wanted to see more—so here's another one that I hope you'll enjoy. Until next time!

CBM MarketWatch

A report of market indicator sales (including % of Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide) by Michael Naiman

Action
#255 VF $45 28%
#271 VF $32 44%
#286 VF $27 47%
#341 NM $29 97%

Adventure
#274 VF- $31 43%
#277 VF $62 86%
#278 VF $52 72%
#279 VF $25 34%

Adv. of Bob Hope
#9 VG $80 Guide

Adv. Into Darkness
#13 VG $40 77%

All Star Western (DC)
#10 FN+ $120 1.21X

Amazing Adult Fantasy
#8 GD $33 80%
#9 FN $86 73%
#9 VG $52 66%
#10 FN $90 76%
#10 VG $52 66%
#12 VG $85 1.08X
#13 VG $25 32%

Amazing Adventures
#3 VG $75 98%
#5 VG $75 98%

Amazing Fantasy
#15 FR $560 93%
#15 GD "$1000" 83%
#15 GD $960 80%

Amazing Spider-Man
#2 VG $600 1.2X
#3 GD $113 60%
#4 GD+ $158 1.01X
#5 FN $600 1.45X
#6 VG- $135 54%
#7 VG- $86 53%
#8 VG- $93 57%
#9 GD $106 1.2X
#14 VF+ $635 49%
#15 VG- $100 89%
#17 VG $40 36%
#33 VF- $100 71%
#41 VG+ $48 Guide
#44 FN+ $42 1.17X
#47 FN $43 1.19X
#59 VF $65 Guide
#96 VF $50 65%
#110 NM- $33 73%
#114 VF $30 1.03X
#121 FN $76 1.69X
#122 NM $168 84%
#122 VF $158 1.41X
#129 VF+ $160 1.24X
#129 VF $157 1.22X
#129 VF $138 1.07X
#129 FN $145 2.68X
#131 NM $39 1.3X
#134 NM- $67 1.67X

Avengers
#2 VG $72 65%
#3 VG $51 65%
#4 VG- $162 56%
#71 NM $26 52%
#83 NM $33 1.03X
#92 NM $31 1.03X
#93 NM $50 63%

Batman
#110 FN $120 91%
#118 FN- $100 85%
#136 FN+ $75 Guide
#169 FN $51 1.31X
#179 FN $38 90%
#200 VG $20 77%

Battle of the Planets
#8 VF $45 3X%
#9 VG $29 7.25X

Ben Casey
#1 NM $65 Guide

Blackhawk
#73 FN $70 93%

Blazing Combat (mag.)
#1 VG $60 1.76X

Brave and Bold
#66 VF $29 Guide
#73 VF $25 86%
#75 VF- $36 1.2X

Captain America
#100 FN $78 70%
#100 VF $300 1.08X
#109 VF+ $50 Guide
#111 VF $30 66%
#113 NM- $60 80%

Captain Marvel Adv.
#29 GD- $45 82%
#70 VG $45 83%
#116 VG- $42 77%
#132 VG $44 96%
#134 VG $42 91%

Cheyenne
#15 FN $15 Guide
#22 VG $11 1.1X
#25 VG $20 1.95X

Colt .45
#4 FN $17 69%
#6 FN $20 74%
#9 FN $16 66%

Conan
#3 VF $28 27%
#4 VF $17 40%
#5 VF $35 83%

Cosmo Merry Martian
#1 GD- $19 1.27X

Cowboy Western Comics
#29 FN $49 49%

Crime Does Not Pay
#48 VG $20 53%
#50 VG $12 30%
#62 VG $10 29%
#66 VG $10 29%
#68 VG $10 29%
#127 VG $10 63%

Crime Must Stop
#NN VG $180 1.41X

Daisy and Donald
#45 VF $25 1.47X

Daredevil
#1 VG $407 1.28X
#1 FN $382 80%
#1 GD- $100 63%
#3 GD+ $38 1.23X
#4 VG- $23 40%
#6 VF $67 67%
#7 VF $165 84%
#7 FN $145 1.72X
#8 FN $39 93%
#10 VF $45 45%
#11 FN $20 95%
#131 VF $39 2.29X
#158 FN+ $88 7.33X
#168 VF $49 1.44X
#168 VF+ $110 3.23X

Frontier Western
#4 VG $20 1.11X

Gene Autry
#49 VG+ $18 1.25X
#58 FN $19 1.03X

Gunsmoke
#13 VG $10 71%

Gunsmoke Western
#36 VG $13 44%
#37 VG $15 68%

Have Gun Will Travel
#4 FN $16 74%
#5 NM $115 1.21X
#9 GD $13 1.79X

Hopalong Cassidy
#8 VG $64 1.19X

Johnny Mack Brown
#2 VF $27 32%

Lawman
#4 VG $28 2.8X
#5 FN $21 1.4X

Lone Ranger
#73 FN $10 56%
#74 FN $10 56%

Maverick
#14 FN $13 49%
FC892 (#1) VG $20 40%

Prize Comics Western
#93 VG $28 Guide
#101 FN $19 49%
#111 FN $16 38%
#115 FN+ $13 49%
#118 FN $15 55%

Rifleman
#3 FN $15 42%
#4 VG $16 80%
#19 VF $40 71%

Rin Tin Tin
#8 FN $10 56%
#19 FN+ $13 87%

Ringo Kid (Atlas)
#8 FN $28 64%
#9 VG $12 64%
#17 VG $12 64%

Roy Rogers
#7 VG $15 50%
#70 FN $9 50%
FC95 GD $45 1.28X

Sugarfoot
FC1098 (#4) VG $5 28%

Tonto
#7 FN $10 66%
#8 FR $10 3.8X
#28 GD $10 3.16X

Two-Gun Kid
#18 FN $10 21%

Western Comics (DC)
#16 FR $20 2X
#46 GD- $7 50%
#50 VG $8 33%
#54 VG $13 54%
#56 GD+ $10 83%
#64 GD $5 50%

MARKET REPORTS

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Things **slowed up** big time in September and October. Close to a 45% drop off in sales. This is worse than 9/11. On the other hand, we have been increasing our sales on eBay, blowing out lots of newer comics from the last 20 years, but excluding comics in the last three years. It may not be news to the readers of CBM that most new books in the last 25 years are worth relatively little and can be had on the open market for 25¢ to $1, if you are willing to pay for a group of comics. These groups are usually 25 to 100 comics. Right now the supply outweighs the demand for these books. If you look at the market for new comics though, the market is ripe for speculation. With the print runs running 30 to 50 thousand comics, these print runs are insanely low. The top sellers, X-Men and JLA, don't even have print runs of 100,000 books. If Marvel and DC want to enlighten me on the real print runs of these books, we could all get a better picture. If the new comic book market is going to survive, these books are going to skyrocket in price in the years to come, if new comics and comic stores still exist.

As for the Old Market, most of my experiences have been on eBay and I am having more luck with lower-grade books than anything else. It's impossible for me to sell either a key issue or a high-grade issue (7.5 or better) without being encased in that magic plastic that CGC puts out. I can't wait two or three months for books to come back.

And while we're at it, let's talk about conventions. Even though conventions are the best place to buy comic books, i.e., looking, seeing, feeling, and smelling the comics (yes, I have been known to **sniff comics** now and again). I am more partial to 1960s and early 1970s comics. I know it sounds funny, but now I'm out of the closet. And I have met others who tell me that they do the same thing—just don't get any boogers on my comics.

Now back to the point. It is getting to the point where there are only two or three shows I want to set up at. By the time I have my booth expense and add the corner fee on top of that along with hotel, gas and food costs, it is making more sense to take that money to a show and buy some comics I can use. I can eBay for three or four months without the hassle of doing a show. You will probably see more dealers going online to buy comics. Ebay is probably the #1 source for back issue comics in the country—this goes for more common stuff than high-end stuff. The auctions houses would be the #2 source for high-end stuff. Number three would be Internet besides eBay. It's a toss up on whether four should be stores or shows.

Most stores do not carry comics in mass. We keep over 60,000 comics in our store, so we are an exception to the rule. And then again, what do I know? I'm just some guy who sells comic books in Alabama. And no, I'm not from Alabama, I just live here! I've had a lot of comic book collections dangled in front of me and hopefully soon we will have a slew of comic reports for you. Next report we will have some sales for some books, and I'll put away my soapbox. I hope you can get something out of this.

I've got an X-Men #1 from 1963 that I'm going to sniff, that was a good year!!

Patrick Marchbanks

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It is once again time for a review of the market from way down south! The last few months have been totally exhilarating with record prices being realized almost every day. A majority of these record-setting prices have been achieved by **Heritage Comic Auctions** who throughout the last year has carried out some of the most amazing comic auctions ever to be undertaken, and who have offered material rarely ever seen for sale. Heritage has truly become a force in the vintage collectible marketplace.

Conventions these past months have also been remarkable with turnouts that appear to be far superior to last year, with almost all events having a decent amount of Golden and Silver Age material available for sale.

Sales have been very steady over the last few months both from our website and auctions held on eBay with the majority of the books being sold achieving above Guide prices. I have experienced a large amount of requests from customers looking for runs of **mid-grade** books, with only a few select customers in search of exceptionally high-grade material. In addition, the current sales of CGC encapsulated books have been very consistent over the past few months. Restored books have also been selling well provided the work was professionally done and limited to a moderate amount of work.

Recent Sales: Batman #10 VG $625; Captain America Comics #1 (coverless, missing cf) $800, Captain Marvel Jr. #2 GD $250; Fantastic Four #1 VG $1700, Motion Picture Funnies #2, 3, 4 (covers) $910, Superman #4 App. FN $1500, X-Men #1 CGC FN+ $1800.

Ted Van Liew

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Despite the prolonged weakness in the economy, sales have been steady. Collectibles, and particularly comics, have

become increasingly well known to the mainstream as good investments as the stock market continues to sputter along. In fact, **CNN Moneyline** recently listed comics as #5 on their hottest investments. High-grade Silver Age Marvels continue to lead the way in demand. Even though the SA DCs are ten times harder to find, particularly in nice shape, the demand for the Marvels is probably 10-15 to 1. Certain DC's are always being sought, though, such as anything by Neal Adams, or near impossible to find issues from the '50s and early '60s. Diehard collectors are always filling in their runs.

Even amongst Marvels, there appears to be a hierarchy. For example, there will be ten Spidey collectors for every Tales To Astonish collector. Of course, in high grade, everything sells. In varying lower grades, issues trickle out, unless we decide to discount them to speed up the process. Most everyone has an eye on investment these days, even if they're true blue collectors. There's always a feeling that the collector may need to recoup his money at some point.

Golden Age books are just steady. It's somewhat unpredictable what collectors will be after at a given time, except that Timelys will always fly, and certain cool, mostly unavailable titles will fly if we're lucky enough to come across them. For example, Prize comics are seldom seen on the market. They are genuinely scarce! I've seen a significant upturn in demand for MLJs, also. DCs are always great to have. Batman and Superman are always very popular, but even second line titles are desirable, such as Leading, Star Spangled, and others. Sensation and Wonder Woman always sell well, as they're tough to find. Atomic Age science fiction does well for us. We have a particular fondness for the feel of that era, and there are just a lot of great books with cool covers and art. Avons, Ziff-Davis, and others are almost all great! Surprisingly, the horror from the same period, which was so hot for a while, has simmered down. They still sell, because they're still scarce and interesting, but a lot of the collectors who were fueling the run on them seem to have gotten most of what they wanted. I'm sure, though, that there are plenty of sick pups like me who still love and want the stuff!

Seventies books continue to grow substantially. While there are still many high grades available in the market, the number is shrinking by the minute, and eventually will be comparable to the Silver Age in scarcity. Some issues, such as black border covers like Hero for Hire #1, Cat #1, Marvel Team-Up #1 and others, are already virtually impossible to find. Daredevils in general have caught fire, presumably because of speculation surrounding the upcoming movie. Daredevil #131 featuring the first Bullseye has gone out of sight, and is impossible to locate in decent grade. All subsequent Bullseye appearances are also flying. Surprisingly, not many collectors have realized that his true first appearance is in the undervalued Nick Fury #15 from 1969! The Frank Miller issues, particularly #158 and 168 (first Elektra) are on fire. Hulk #141, with Doc Samson's first appearance, is a house afire too. Many other Hulks are very sought after too. Very under priced!

Here are a few **recent sales**: DD #168 NM- $120, X-Men #1 VG $1100, #49 NM $175, Avengers #20 NM/NM- $145; Spidey #121 VF/NM $250, #129 VF/NM $295, #129 VF $135; Thrilling Comics #45 NM- $475, Strange Terrors #4 F- $225, Spidey #42 CGC NM+ 9.6 $1400, #41 VF/NM $300, Hulk #5 VG $185; Jimmy Olsen #8 VG $75, #24 VF- $125

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After just attending the **Multi-selling show** in Boston this past November, I have to say that selling comics may be getting harder than normal this late in the season. While the New York Big Apple show was a bit down in sales for us it was superior in attendance and money changing hands compared to Boston.

Look, I agree that Christmas, the slow economy and the general area of Boston is all cause for a hard market to deal with if selling in the New England area. Right after the doors opened on Friday evening I could tell how tough a weekend it was going to be. By my head count (and my tables were right by the front door) I figured the initial rush at around 350 people. Not bad, but what are they looking for? Deep discounts and books that were slashed to the bone were the sellers of the moment. I had one father borrowing $9 from his son in order to close a $13 total sale—this is the sign of tough times!

My traveling partner from Madcap Comics and I weathered the setup day on Thursday, the Friday opening and all day Saturday before we decided we would ask the promoter if we could leave early Sunday and avoid the massive ice storm that hit just maybe 20 miles from the show. So, after two real days of sales to the public that managed to stagger in, both of us had barely managed to make enough money to cover expenses. Now to be fair, my friend from Madcap Comics had a huge display selling 50% off Bronze and Silver Age and $5 cent books had a decent time of it and made some money for the wallet. Many other dealers reported to me that sales were either way down from the previous year or not happening at all.

The show was not just a comic show, it also was advertised as a Sci-Fi and Fantasy show as well. How these other folks made out I really have no idea. I have written a few reports in CBM and all were honest and reflected the market at the moment. I am not trying to start a new direction in my reports by stating doom and gloom, but a serious trend to me is now apparent! Mid-Ohio will be a serious barometer for me and add more light to the problem if it does in fact seem to be sticking around for a while.

What did I **sell**? Well, I did manage to sell a few decent Fawcett Captain Marvels to a collector, Nick Fury #15 with an appearance of the original Bulls Eye was speculated on, Daredevil #158 and #168 had a lot of interest but few wanted to pay the new demand price for them. I sold a Daredevil #131 in VG for $40, a Daredevil #100 in VF for $30, a Fantastic Four #77 in VF for $60 and a low-grade Fantastic Four #9 for $25. That is about all the highlights that I can relate for this report.

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Hello from sunny and mild Central Florida. As the holidays approach sales continue to be hit or miss. I have had some sizable sales followed by quiet periods. It is sad to see the negative effect that Internet sales are having on **over the counter** retail sales. The retail face of America is changing forever. Personally I will miss the smaller mom and pop stores that gave this country it's retail identity. When is the last time you

actually received personal service at a Wal-Mart?

We did our first Florida comic book **convention** in quite a while last weekend in Tampa. The show was very well run (thanks Tim!) and we had many sales including a Superman #7 VG for $700. It was nice to see that some collectors are still purchasing in person. Hopefully we can get back to a regular convention schedule in Florida.

We continue to sell vintage comic books, Disneyana and a small selection of vintage toys. I am thankful for my steady group of regular customers who continue to purchase expensive comics—I just wish I had more of them!

Silver Age 1956-1969: DC comics were popular this month. Thankfully we have a clientele who will purchase comics in most any grade and we continue to move out the popular DC titles. Also sold a few key Marvels.

We sell no slabbed comics—thus our customers are primarily collectors. As usual the other publishers lag behind in sales. We sell Charlton, Dell, Archie, Harvey and ACG sporadically. We did purchase a nice Dell collection this week that includes many westerns and movie/TV photo covers. These books are in lower to mid grade and should fine a home at some point.

Recent Sales: Amazing Spider-Man #3 VF $1800; X-Men #1 VG $895; Tales of Suspense #39 VG/FN $750; Superman #100 GD $125; Brave & Bold #37 VF $135; Batman #155 GD $30; Showcase #60 FN $45; Uncle Scrooge #20 FN $25; Herbie #1 FR $20; Turok Son of Stone #3 GD $25; Silver Surfer #4 FN/VF $150.

Golden Age 1935-1955: Demand continues for pre-1946 and first appearance and origin issues. The problem is that many of the collectors asking cannot afford the books once I produce them. I had a situation last month where a Central Florida collector insisted on only high grade mid 1940s World's Finest comics. After assuring me that he was serious I brought in a selection of over ten World's Finest comics from this period in Very Fine or better condition. Most of the prices were right on Overstreet or a bit above. As soon as this collector saw such a large selection of just what he was seeking he started nit-picking each book and wanted them at 30% to 40% below Overstreet. This is what happens more times than not when you produce expensive books that are just what the customer asked for. Frustrating! We did pick up a nice group of original Classic Comics books from the original owner. I also bought a large set of 1960 Warren magazines from a divorce settlement. Sad how many collections I buy that result from marital or substance abuse problems.

Recent Sales: Superman #7 VG $700; Adventure #70 GD $125; World's Finest #13 GD $90; Red Raven #1 VG/FN $3000; Capt Marvel #35 VF $120; Four Color #16 VG $400.

Not much happening this month on **art** or **toy sales**. We did sell a 1964 Aurora Superman in box for $250. A couple Hanna-Barbera animation drawings also sold. It has been a little while since a nice group of pre-1970 comic related toys have come in. Where is that elusive group of 1950s to 1960s metal lunch boxes? Oh well, perhaps they will all come in at one time and make my Christmas even merrier! Have a great holiday season. When visiting the Walt Disney World area please stop by and say hello. See you in thirty!

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We've been playing comics this time around. Selling a little bit of everything and proving my partner's theory that every back issue will sell at least once. **We've sold** Dell westerns, Big Little Books, similar Silver Age comics in low and high grade, Archie's Super Duck, 1950s anti-Communist propaganda (Is This Tomorrow? for a French student's college project), low-grade Disneys, Charlton's Zaza The Mystic, Terry and the Pirates comics, runs of '80s Roms and Micronauts, Night Nurse, low-grade keys, high-grade Sgt. Furys, restored ECs and more.

The above list is just a sampling of comics that we rarely ever see go out the door. These sales renew any flagging faith I had in stockpiling "off-brands" in order to offer a little bit of everything to potential buyers. Of course, the prices some of those comics sold for were discounted. The customers know what they want to pay and their offers may contradict my price. Taking offers is a flexible way to negotiate sales if no fixed discount platform is in place. We accept some discounts and reject others. Rarely has this created friction between our customers and our staff. Treating the back-issue sales portion of the business as a collector's playground fits our mentality on reselling old comics.

Discounting comics has been argued, chastised and applauded by comics retailers in trade publications for years. We disagree with dealers that savage customers requesting discounts. Discounts sell comics just as they sell shampoo at Osco and wool sweaters at J.C. Penney. Prices below retail (Overstreet) increase sales potential and clear out items that gathered dust on the shelves. The beauty about being "your own boss" at the comic book store level is the knowledge that we can experiment with pricing anytime, anyway we want. Discounts can be pulled, adjusted or negotiated in league with supply-and-demand. And, like most every other aspect of direct customer-contact business, disclose your sales mindset or policy to the customers so they feel fully informed.

The money we spend with each other in this hobby/business forms temporary bonds between seller and buyer. Reducing a customer's guesswork about our business builds trust and continued transactions.

Recent sales of Golden Age: Black Knight #1 GD/VG $129; Black Rider #9 (#2) VG/FN $55; Chamber of Chills V2/#4 GD $30; Crimes by Women #10 CGC 6.0 $925; Crime SuspenStories #18 FN $48; Detective Comics #41 GD- $300; Eerie #8 GD $40; Frontline Combat #4 FN $63; Haunt Of Fear #17 VG/FN $65; Is This Tomorrow? #1 VG+ $55; Rugged Action #1 FN+ $50; Shock SuspenStories #4 GD+ $30; Terry and the Pirates #18 VG+ $92, #19 FN $29; Weird Mystery Tales #1 VF/NM $44; Western Kid #1 VG/FN $48; Whiz #47 VG/FN $90; Zaza #10 FN+ $30.

Silver Age Sales: Amazing Adventures #4 VG/FN $105; Amazing Spider-Man #12 CGC 7.0 $300, #52 FN $27, #53 FN $27, #54 FN $27; Batman #114 FN- $90, #115 FN+ $130, #192 VG $42, #140 FN+ $60, Fantastic Four #31 FN $30, #38 FN $30; Forever People #3 NM- $29, #4 NM $32, #5 NM $32; Green Lantern #8 FN $30; Journey Into Mystery #110 VF- $56; Mister Miracle #3 NM $32, #5 NM $32; Sgt. Fury #33 NM- $30; Silver Surfer #1 FN/VF $200, #4 FN/VF $175; Strange Adventures #144 FN+ $32; Strange Tales #83 FN $42; Tales of Suspense #9 VG $74, #19 FN- $75; Tales to Astonish #93 FN/VF $30; X-Men #16 VF $90.

Bronze Age Sales: Amazing Spider-Man

#194 VF/NM $20; Ghost Rider #2 VF $17, #11 NM $36; Incredible Hulk #181 FN/VF $360, #181 FN $200; Marvel Premiere #28 NM $15; Night Nurse #1 VF $73; Where Monsters Dwell #34 NM- $12; X-Men #94 VG $108, #111 VF $40.

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I just received the new **Heritage Comics** Signature auction catalog and, as always, it is jam-packed with enough beautiful comics to keep me in a daze for hours. If you don't receive these catalogs, I would seriously recommend you give them a try. What is amazing is that it seems lately there has been a major overload of books and collections coming to auction, online and via catalog. Pretty much anything you could possibly want has gone across the auction block lately. Does this mean that more and more collectors are getting out of the game, or at least thinning out their holdings?

I'm still waiting to see how long so many great books can actually be absorbed into the market. If we want to keep the hobby alive we have got to keep bringing in new collectors (readers). The non-reader will jump ship the moment another "hot" collectible shows up. No matter how well the comic market holds up there will be a select group of people that **love their comics** for what they are.

These are the guys and gals that will keep a seller in business when sanity finally prevails and fad collectors start throwing their money in a new direction. The absolute best way to make sure you maintain a customer base, when the multiple-Guide trend dies down, is customer service. The next buyer you jump through hoops to please may just be the one that hits the lottery and keeps coming back. I'm the last guy that'll say the customer is always right—there are occasions when they're not—but it sure doesn't hurt to go that extra mile. I value the relationship I have with my customers over all else. As far as dealers go, I am probably one of the smallest there is (not not in stature, in sales and stock), but I have ended up with a huge base of customers that are always coming back for more. The best part of it is that I've struck up quite a few new friendships.

Back to the bit about readers, if all the next generation knows is slabbed books then we may have a problem a few years down the line. Nostalgia is a big factor in collectibles, and if the kids aren't reading the books then what is there to pull this generation back to buying comics 20 years down the line? I have actually gotten comments from buyers that are amazed that I really **read my comics**. What that tells me is that many of these buyers are buying them for investment only.

I can't see what good a comic is if you can't read it. You can still read a NM book and slip it right back into a Mylar in the same condition it left. Heck, my 7- and 10-year-old daughters can manage to read their DC and Disney funny animal collection without any damage just fine. If, and that's a big IF, I ever have a CGC book to sell, it has to fit two criteria: 1) it will not have been slabbed by me, and 2) by the time it reaches eBay I will have cracked it open to read what is inside. The upside of that is that the buyer will not only get a readable comic but also a couple free pieces of plastic that they can use for any number of household needs—handy dinner trays, heater deflectors, cat litter pans. God help the slab that gets between me and my comic!

As to hooking the next generation—how about giving a small stack of your junk comics to the kid next door or letting your nieces and nephews thumb through a pile of your cheaper stuff. You don't really need 50 unread copies of Harbinger #1—do you?

Wertham revisited?

I recently got an **auction cancelled** by **eBay** due to its mature and sexual content. What is amazing is that the comic pulled was a Charlton romance, Just Married #94, and the sexual content was a spanking panel and had no sexual content or allusion whatsoever. It seems that the word spanking conjures up all kinds of perverse, pornographic images (at least it must for those doing the cancellations) so if I want to re-list the comic I must do so under the Mature category. Ain't gonna happen! So, all you guys out there selling copies of Dennis the Menace—be careful! Ebay might deem your books obscene if Henry so much as lays a hand on Dennis' posterior! Most of all be thankful that we've got the e-censors to keep us safe from such filth. As to trying to explain the error of their ways to eBay? I'd have better luck finding the original cover artwork to Flash Comics #1.

Here are a few **Recent Sales:** A VG- Heart and Soul #1, an obscure romance by Andru & Esposito, ended at $47; a GD+ Calling All Girls, with a young Liz Taylor cover sold for $39; a FN copy of Crime-Fighting Detective #15 with an unseen-in-Gerber L.B. Cole cover went for $28; a hard-to-find VG Police Badge #479, #5, ended at $39; a clean, solid, 260-page Little Audrey Yearbook from St. John ended at $169 after a bit of rabid bidding; and, the shocker...a lower grade Gasoline Alley #2, which is listed as being an 8 on the Gerber Scarcity index, sold for $115, which is just shy of what Overstreet has it listed for in VF.

A few **purchases:** Crime and Justice #25, a book that is listed in Overstreet as "**exist**?"—yep, it does; a Li'l Pan #6, which I have been searching high and low for for ages; a Kid Zoo #1 with gorgeous colors; a Bobby Benson (of B-Bar-B Riders fame) giveaway comic/book from 1936; and my favorite find of the month, a promotional comic celebrating World Color Press Day in 1977. This comic not only has Marvel and DC characters but Archie and Harvey characters also. Talk about the ultimate team-up comic! Not exactly a bunch of upper-tier comics but not a boring read in the bunch!

Ebay watch: A lot of two '40s Canadian Joke Comics, #4 and #6, sold for an amazing $455; a copy of the first issue of the very mag you're holding now sold for $45; a complete run of the always-in-demand Jetta #5-#7 in the VG- to VG range went for $162; a Marvel Family statuette advertising sign from 1946 got one bid of at least $4995 but did not reach its reserve; a Mint Donald Duck's Atom Bomb from Carl Barks' files sold for $1413; and a NM 1935 Whitman Donald Duck #978, also from Barks' files, sold for $3600.

On a final note, this **Halloween** my friend John ran out of candy and dipped into a box of cheap comics to hand out to the kids. The kids were actually excited to be getting comics instead of candy. I know what I'll be doing next year (other than slipping on a mask and showing up on John's doorstep). Until next time...

Opinions expressed in CBM *"Market Reports" are solely those of the individual dealers and collectors who contribute them. Prices vary by location, date of transaction and other factors.*

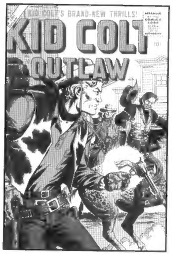
Cowboy Hero

Continued from page 16

Comics is one no one ever talks about. A combination of TV emerging as a medium in 1947 and the postwar explosion of paperback novels is alleged to have killed off the pulps. They were part of the ambush, true, but just as guilty was the comic book, specifically the western comic book.

Pulp genres ebbed and flowed with the times. But the western proved the most reliable and enduring. Cowboys were the bread and butter of the pulp magazine publishers. When comics embraced the cowboy, pulp western readers embraced the comics. There were only so many dimes to go around. After only a year or two, western pulps started to bite the dust. Street & Smith's *Western Story* was only the first of these. Pulp and comics publisher Ace folded *Western Trails* and *Western Aces* that same year.

From 1949 on, the death toll mounted each year. Fiction House canceled westerns from 1950 to 1954 until none were left. Thrilling dumped their westerns including *The Masked Rider* in 1953. The next year Popular massacred a dozen titles, ranging from *Dime Western* to *.44 Western*.



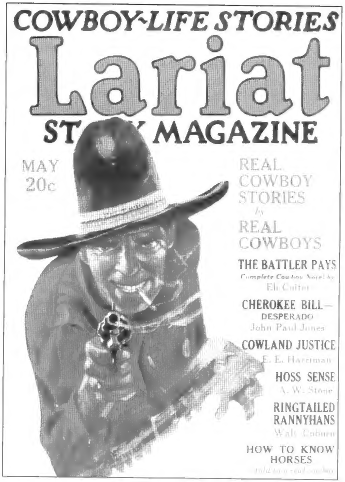
Even Martin Goodman, whose pulp-publishing career started with a thing called *Western Supernovels* in 1933, cashed in his chips in 1957, canceling *Two-Gun Western* among others. Columbia—the last to go—hung on until 1960. They were still minting money publishing Archie Comics. Westerns were old hat.

Maybe the comic book western would have died out in the mid-'50s after DC's revival of The Flash, Green Lantern and the others who would come to constitute the new Justice League of America, but cowboys were taking over TV faster than the detectives and comedians could fight back. A new wave of TV western comics, spearheaded by Walt Disney's revival of *Davy Crockett* and Dell Comics, came to replace Fawcett's B-movie cowboy titles.

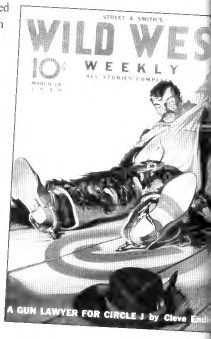
The tidal wave rolled clear into the 1960s, unaffected by the rising tide of a new generation of super-heroes. Virtually every television town-tamer, from Annie Oakley to Zorro, had his or her own comic book at one time or another. And that's not counting western movie adaptations.

Since that time, westerns have come and gone. Marvel kept their cowheroes going into the '70s. DC never revived their posse after the Silver Age super-hero revival. Thirty years later, you'd have to search mighty far and wide to find a successful cowboy in comic books.

And to this day, there has never been a Kid Colt movie, despite the great-sounding character name. Why not? Well, a cowboy is a cowboy is a cowboy. All you have to do is change the name, the horse and the territory and you have a different but really similar character. Why license the Rawhide Kid when you can take the same stock character, change the color of his hair, eyes and horse, rename him the Lariat Kid and call him brand spanking new?



Today, the western is virtually dead in comics, TV and film. The why of it is easy to discover if you look to the movies. The cowboy has opened up a new frontier. It started when Han Solo first walked into the Cantina on Mos Eisley, acting like the tumbleweed hired gun he was, and blew away a bounty hunter with his trusty blaster. This was the old "Bat Durston" idea—a pulp western set in Outer Space that took root in the 1950s. After *Star Wars*, the western was a goner in virtually every medium.



Maybe we don't need westerns anymore, some say. I doubt it. In his day, the US cowboy ranged from the tropics to the Canadian sub-Arctic. Now he's off in deep space, wearing a different hat. Who's to say he can't make a comic book comeback?

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